

LONDON READER

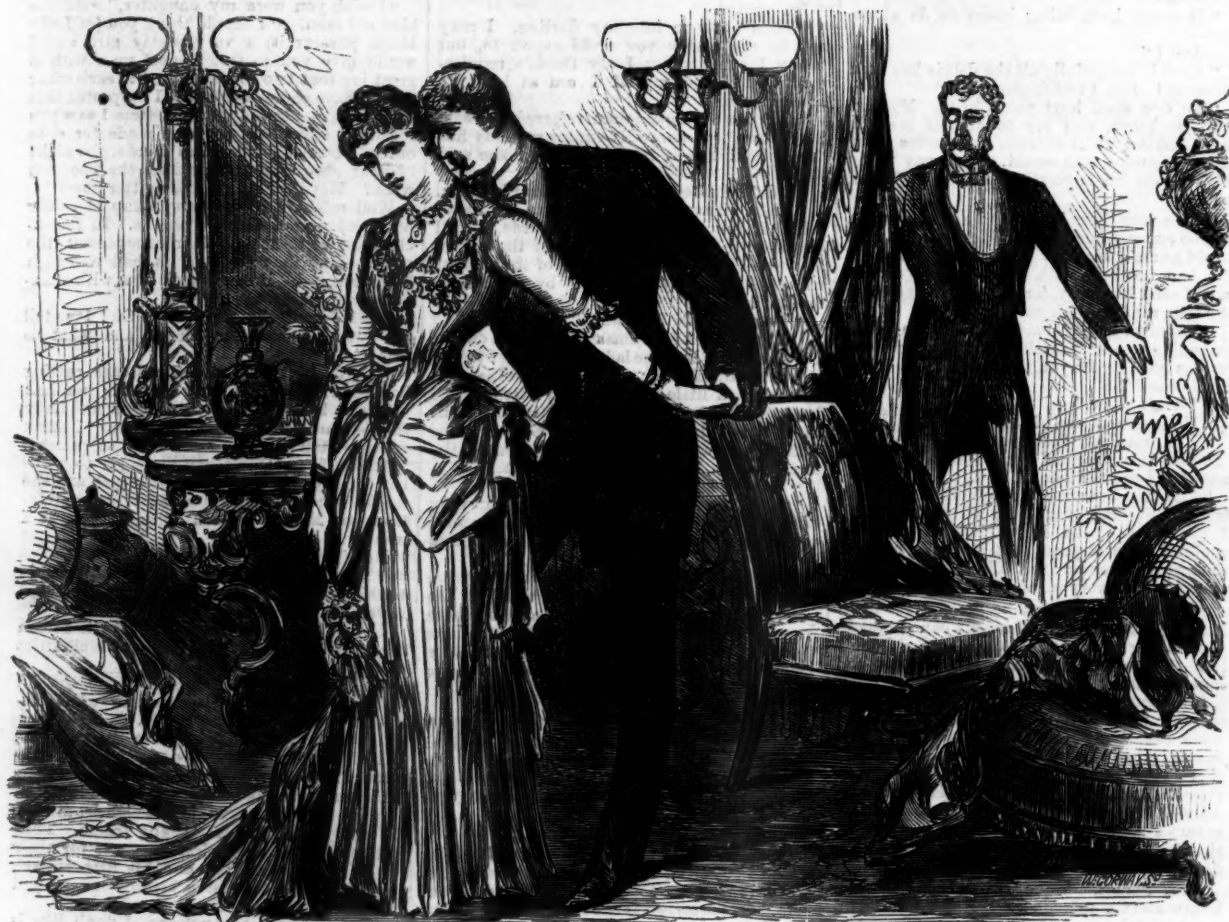
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.]

IVA'S QUEST.

CHAPTER IX.

It was there, just as Iva had seen it in his dreams—the deep square hole, like a grave, in all but shape, yawning wide, as though waiting for its victim.

For one moment Iva's blood ran cold, brave sailor as he was, coming though he did of a long line of noble ancestors, when he looked at that awful hole and recognised that the scene tallied in all respects with that of his dream.

For an instant he trembled—not for himself; he would have faced any perils which threatened only him. His fears were for the young girl at his side, who, but a brief half-hour before, had promised to be his wife.

"Gerda, this is terrible!"

"Yes," her teeth chattering even in the warm midday sunshine. "Iva, what does it mean?"

Mr. Ducie looked intently at the hole. He

would fain have found a natural explanation if he could.

"What is the usual appearance of the spot? To whom does it belong?"

"It belongs to papa," said Gerda, quickly. "As to its appearance, it is just smooth grass. The chestnut trees and, as you observe just before, the elms with which Sir James's property begins on the other side of the little gate. That narrow iron railing divides the two estates."

"And nothing grew here?"

"Nothing," she said, decidedly. "I know papa once wished chestnuts to be planted, so as to carry on the avenue to the very limit of his grounds, but the gardener thought there was not room without interfering with the elms. He wanted to have a rustic seat here, but papa did not like the idea, so it has remained just a piece of ground covered with grass. We have fancied the soil very good, for the grass here is greener and more velvety than any in the grounds."

Iva looked again. True enough, the hole was bordered by a strip of grass, green as emeralds, smooth as velvet, but—and this

struck him most of all—there was no mound of loose earth flung aside by the digger of the hole.

Many a wheelbarrow load of mould would be needed to fill up the chasm. Whoever dug the hole must surely have tossed up loose earth in plenty. Where was it?

Not a vestige of it remained. There was not even a sign of dust upon the border of grass. The hole was there; but who dug it, or how they contrived to remove all sign of their work was an utter mystery.

"I don't like it, Gerda," said her lover, gravely. "My darling, I cannot fathom it!"

She shivered.

"Who do you think did it, Iva?"

It was remarkable that neither of them would admit the thought that no human hands had dug the hole; neither of them would so much as hint Nurse Brown's superstitions might not be unfounded.

"I don't know. Gerda, when were you here last?"

"About a week ago."

"And you know no one who has been her

since? You see, it is not quite a public thoroughfare."

"Oh, no. No one could go through except they had business at the Chase or Sir James Pierrepont's."

"The gate is not locked."

"You are thinking you once got here without starting either from the Chase or the Hall. I had forgotten that; but then you came alone. Whoever dug this hole must have had assistance."

"Why?"

"It would have taken hours to do alone, and—"

"And?"

"Look how carefully all the debris has been removed! Iva, I feel frightened!"

"No one shall hurt you, Gerda. My darling, be brave, and try to answer me. Is there anyone at Netherton who owes your father a grudge, and would try to pay it by working on his superstitious fears? Think well."

"I am sure there is no one; and, Iva, papa has no superstitious fears. He always laughs at old nurse's stories. I think sometimes if she had not been with us so many years he would send her away, for he seems vexed when she tells me her old legends."

"We must go on," said Iva, with an effort preparing to tear himself away from the mysterious hole. "Do you think I had better tell Sir James?"

"I don't know."

"He is almost one of the family."

"Yes, but Lady Pierrepont—"

"She is a dear old soul! Surely you are not afraid to trust her?"

"She has become my stepmother's dearest friend. She sees everything with Julia's eyes. I don't mean she is unkind to me—she couldn't be to anyone; but she tells me my untidied behaviour to Lady Ducie has disappointed her very much."

"Poor darling!" and he pressed the little hand he held. "Gerda, I hope I can persuade your father to give you to me soon. I don't like to think of you being left long at the mercy of Lady Ducie."

Sir James was delighted to see them, but warned to attention by Gerda's words Iva knew that Lady Pierrepont's greeting of his fiancée lacked the warmth it would have had three months ago. But still it was a very pleasant luncheon-party, and when Sir James wanted to show the young couple his conservatory and its latest additions, it was a relief that his wife and her knitting remained indoors.

"Sir James," began Iva, when the glass house and its splendours had been duly inspected, "don't you think Gerda looks ill?"

Not at that moment, surely, for she was blushing rosy red, and there was the light of a great happiness shining in her blue eyes.

"I did think so," said the old gentleman, kindly. "I've often said to Lady Pierrepont our little girl needed something to brighten her up; but it strikes me, Master Iva, your coming has done it."

"At any rate, she has promised to brighten me not only now but always. You are her eldest friend, Sir James; I want you to be the first to know Gerda is my future wife."

Sir James stroked his pet's fair hair fondly. "You'll be a likely couple, and I don't know any news that could have pleased me better. You see, Iva, there have been changes here, and I think the little girl found it hard work to take a second place where she had been first."

"She will be first with me always, Sir James. If Lord Ducie thinks me presumptuous, may I reckon on you to say a good word for me?"

"Papa won't mind," said Gerda, falteringly. "He doesn't want me now, Iva."

"And I shall want you always, sweetheart."

Sir James played absently with one of his coat buttons.

"I fancy the person with whom the decision really rests is not Lord Ducie."

Iva understood.

"You mean he will be influenced by his wife, but Lady Ducie has shown no great affection for Gerda. I think she will manage to spare her."

"I doubt it."

"She hates me," came slowly from the girl's lips. "Only two nights ago she said I ought to think myself fortunate if an honest man asked me to be his wife."

Iva smiled.

"Then have no fear, my darling. I may not be the match you could aspire to, but surely I come under Lady Ducie's requirements. I flatter myself I am at least an honest man."

"But not the honest man referred to," said Sir James. "I shrewdly expect my lady had one special one in her mind when she said that."

Gerda's blushes seemed to confirm his idea.

"Then I have a rival," said Iva. "Never mind, if you are on my side, Gerda, I will dispute you successfully with all the world. But won't you tell me the name of the 'honest man' so specially favoured by your stepmother?"

"I cannot; oh, I cannot!"

"Gerda," said Sir James, "I think you ought. Do you know, Iva, the lady had half bewitched me into thinking her a model stepmother and this child a little rebel until yesterday she happened to show her true colours and let us know whom she had selected for Gerda? She talked my wife over into believing in the arrangement, but she couldn't talk me."

"Who is it, Gerda?"

"He never said a word to me about it, only he is always coming to the Chase, and I couldn't help seeing that Lady Ducie wished it."

"My dear," said Iva, simply, "we are getting no nearer. Can't you trust me, Gerda? Do you think I could believe you one of those women who fancy any man who speaks to them a lover? Tell me the name of Lady Ducie's protégé? Indeed, it is needful for me to know it."

"Laurence Ward."

Iva started. He had been long enough at Netherton in the summer to learn its social code and the status of its inhabitants. He knew perfectly well that Laurence Ward had no more right to aspire to the hand of Miss Ducie than he had to a coronet.

"She must be mad."

"She likes him very much. He was dining with us the other night, and when he was gone I ventured to say a word in disparagement of him. She returned it would be an excellent match for me, and she hoped I should be lucky enough to gain his affections."

"She must be mad."

"No," said Sir James, sagely. "She is not a good woman, and I suspect a hidden motive in all she does, but I cannot agree with you there, Iva. Whatever Lady Ducie is she is as sane as we are."

"If she is so eager to lose you, Gerda, it will be the more in our favour," urged Iva.

Sir James shook his head.

"You may put me down as an old marplot or a Job's comforter, but I feel pretty certain Lady Ducie will oppose your engagement bitterly!"

"But why?"

"She is desperately jealous of Gerda."

"But she can't help seeing she will have less cause for jealousy if Gerda is married. She would then gain undivided influence over Lord Ducie."

"She has that now almost. I have studied my lady carefully, and I think her object is to place Gerda in a position inferior to her own. She wants to shine as something above her. She will find some plausible objection to your suit, Iva. Her real refusal will be because a marriage with you would make Gerda a far richer woman than herself, and also make her heiress apparent to her own title."

"Lord Ducie may have half-a-dozen sons; and, besides, I don't want his title. If he will give me Gerda I shall have nothing left to wish for."

"I suppose you have settled matters between yourselves, young people?"

"Oh, yes."

"Perhaps you did the business coming over here? That may have had something to do with your late arrival?"

Gerda's blushes told him he was not mistaken.

"I wish you were my daughter," said the kind old man. "I should think you (as Lady Ducie phrases it) a very pretty girl, and I would give you to this honest man with a great joy that two so well suited to each other should have come together. I suspected this months ago—almost the first time I saw you together, I thought you were made for each other. You remember, Miss Gerda, the night of your ghastly experiences in the chestnut walk? Heyday! what's the matter now?"

Well might he ask—every scrap of colour had died out of Gerda's cheeks. In the excitement of telling of their engagement the tragic sight that followed it had well-nigh been forgotten—it came back now with startling distinctness.

"Tell him," she pleaded. "Oh! Iva, tell Sir James about your dream, and what he saw!"

"My dear child," said Sir James, patting her head, "you are over excited; we had better go back to the drawing-room, and Lady Pierrepont shall give you some tea. I think we won't tell her this grand news at present. You see, Lady Ducie has managed to make her think you a very wilful little girl, and she might not be so ready with her congratulations to Master Iva on winning you as I was!"

But Gerda was in tears.

"Tell him," she pleaded. "Sir James is too kind to laugh at me. And, oh! Iva, it makes me shiver when I think of it!"

Iva told the tale very simply. His dream first, then what they had seen in the chestnut walk.

He did not enlarge on the theme—he did not mention his own impressions when discussing the matter with Gerda.

He spoke very briefly, and to the purpose; but if Sir James had needed any confirmation of his, then he had it in the emotions which now and again sounded in his voice, and the convulsive shudders which from time to time shook Gerda's slight frame. They both waited in breathless suspense for their old friend's comments, and his first remark was the more impressive because it conveyed neither implicit belief nor scornful doubt.

"I don't like it, my dears—I don't like it at all," said the old gentleman, promptly.

"And what does it mean?"

Sir James shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know; till I used to meet Master Iva, so frequently playing ghosts on his own account, I was an intense scoffer at things supernatural, but I have had more patience with those who believed in them since. I could give you one good piece of advice, but I don't suppose you'd take it?"

"We would," cried Gerda. "Sir James, advice is just what we want."

"Then, my dear, forget the dream as though you had never heard it, and dismiss the hole in the chestnut walk as though you had never seen it."

Iva sighed.

"Good advice, I grant, but impossible to follow."

"I said you wouldn't take it. The next best thing would be for Gerda to pay a long visit away from this neighbourhood."

"But there is no one to ask me," objected Gerda, "or I would go directly."

"That's a difficulty. Gerda, you mustn't let your mind dwell on these things. Remember, child, you are Iva's promised wife; whatever troubles and annoyances beset you must end in less than three years. Lord Ducie has

no power over you from the day you come of age. You can marry your lover then with or without consent."

"We can't wait three years," groaned Iva. "It seems an eternity!"

"Well, I'd rather you spent the time thinking of plans to conciliate Lord Ducie than pondering over dreams and apparitions. Depend upon it, children, the best thing is to forget them. Why, you'd be fancying holes in every part of your father's grounds."

Iva hesitated.

"Did you ever hear the legend, before, Sir James?"

"Often."

"And has the hole really been seen?"

"I have never seen it."

Perhaps Gerda's eyes pleaded for a more intelligible answer; perhaps he reflected they could get the truth from others.

"The fact is, Iva, the hole has been supposed to appear there within my memory. Once, just before your ancestor, Ralph Ducie, left his home, and the other time quite recently."

"Recently?"

"As far as I can make out no one saw it but my gamekeeper, and I gave him a sovereign to hold his tongue. He described it just as you do, and he declared he saw it one night when you were staying here, Gerda—in fact, the very night before Iva left us. He is a taciturn fellow, not much liked in the village. He took it into his head to come and tell me the story, and I am sure the sovereign was an unexpected pleasure to him; in fact, it may have been a needless expenditure, for Jim talks so little I don't if he would have divulged his experiences to anyone."

"And was he frightened?"

"Not in the least. He ascribed the matter to poachers who had owed Lord Ducie a grudge. He was rather afraid, being so near our lands, he would be summoned as a witness against them, and I comforted him by telling him I'd see the ringleader and make him fill up the hole before the morning."

"But how could you—"

"Do you fancy I'd have the ghostly version of the hole got about? Why, you'd see all the villagers coming up in a procession of two-and-two at dusk to 'look for the hole,' and Gerda's father would just be frantic. No; I'll stroll down as far as the spot with you when you go home, and just see if it's really there. If it is, I own I'd like a look at it. Then I shall remark to Jim 'the poachers have been at their old trick again.'"

"But," said Gerda, breathlessly, "when you promised to make the poachers fill it up, did you really?"

"I went down to look at it at daybreak, and found it closed. You see, Gerda, I am not positive there ever was a hole. It rests on the testimony of Jim Green."

"Do you know," said Iva, suddenly, "I am afraid I am going over to Nurse Brown's theory."

"Nonsense!" said Sir James, sharply. "How can you be so absurd?"

"Her story runs the hole closes of its own accord, and that it announces some trouble threatening the family at Netherton. Now, you confess it was seen just before my grandfather left the Chase, and I know enough of the sorrow caused by the family feud to pronounce it a very real trouble, indeed."

Sir James would not show himself impressed, but asked, ironically,—

"Perhaps, Iva, you think your own departure from the neighbourhood a calamity to the Ducies, since the date of Jim Green's vision precisely corresponds with your leaving us?"

Iva flushed. Young men are very sensitive to ridicule.

"To my mind, Sir James, a very great misfortune fell on the house of Ducie about that time."

"Indeed! What was it, if not your absence?"

"I allude to Lord Ducie's marriage. It

must have been at the very time of your gamekeeper's alarm. Sir James, I hope I am not a cruel judge or a vindictive one, but some instinct tells me there began sore trouble for the Ducies when the head of the house gave his name to the woman the law calls his wife."

Silence deep and long. His words struck home. No one had spoken, when a message came from Lady Pierrepont that the tea was getting cold. What could keep them in the conservatory?

"It was my fault," her husband told her when he had brought the levers to the drawing-room. "I got talking to Iva of old times, and we never noticed how late it was getting."

"Gerda should have come to me," said the hostess, discontentedly. "I do not think it proper, Sir James, that she should so pointedly prefer your company and that of Mr. Ducie. I fear my sweet friend is right when she tells me her stepdaughter is fast and unwomanly."

Iva's eyes flashed.

"It would be well for Lady Ducie had she one-half of Gerda's grace and modesty. Lady Pierrepont, I fear we must be starting. We have a long walk before us, and Sir James has promised to accompany us part of the way."

The old lady watched him shrewdly while Gerda was putting on her hat and jacket.

"I did not mean to be hard on her," she said, in an accent of regret. "I used to think her a sweet, unaffected girl until I heard of her home conduct."

It was impossible for Iva to keep up his anger. He knew that Lady Pierrepont was cruelly deceived, and in her heart loved Gerda still.

"Her home conduct is perfect, Lady Pierrepont; at least I think so."

"Perhaps you are a practical judge?"

"She is my kinswoman, you know," remembering Sir James's warning their engagement should not be mentioned to his wife.

"Perhaps you want her for something more, but it won't do, Iva. You must never even think of such a thing. Gerda's husband is chosen."

"So she has told me," said Iva, forgetting that, though strictly true, his words were certainly false in the interpretation his listener would place on them.

"Indeed! then it is really settled?"

"Perfectly, as far as she and her lover are concerned. Lord Ducie's consent has yet to be given."

"He won't refuse it. His wife told me yesterday he had quite a fatherly liking for Mr. Ward, and that they were both resolved that no mere mercenary motives should part the young couple."

"I am quite sure no mercenary considerations will influence Gerda or her betrothed. Here she comes. Confess, Lady Pierrepont, she is a bride any man might envy."

The old lady smiled, and was very gracious in her farewells.

CHAPTER X.

It was striking five as Gerda turned out of the grand old house—on one side her lover, on the other Sir James Pierrepont.

"You will speak to Lord Ducie to-night," suggested Sir James, who felt the deepest interest in the love affair he had foretold. "I think it would be the wisest course."

"I shall speak to him before I sleep," said Iva. "He has been so very kind to me that but for my lady's influence and the strange infatuation respecting Mr. Ward I should have been quite hopeful as to his reply, but anything is better than suspense, and besides, I would not subject my darling even for a day to the indignity of a clandestine engagement. I want the whole world to know what a prize I have won."

"And they say enthusiasm's out of fashion," said Sir James, laughing. "My dears, I wish the decision rested with me."

"Papa can't find any fault with Iva," said Gerda, simply. "I think he must consent."

"Papa has someone at his elbow now, my dear, to bias his opinion. Gerda, if the worst comes, and the answer is 'No,' you must remember that three years won't last for ever; and, meanwhile, so long as I live you have both of you a staunch friend."

Talking as they were they had advanced to the little gate and passed through it. Now they stood in Lord Ducie's grounds.

Iva started.

"Surely this is the spot."

He felt bewildered. He stood there—the chestnut tree in front of him, the wicket-gate behind. He stood on a small piece of waste ground, covered by the most luxuriant grass, smooth as velvet and green as emerald. He stared about him. Surely this was where he had seen the hole, the yawning chasm of his dream.

He moved his foot impatiently about, as though to test the hardness of the ground. It was firm and smooth as possible—the grass had no sign of ever having been disturbed.

Iva and Gerda stood dumbstruck. What were they to believe? which was real?—the open grave of the morning, the smooth, hard surface of the afternoon?

"I see," said Sir James, gravely, and Gerda always felt thankful he did not laugh, "the poachers have filled up the hole. I never went to Jim and cross questioned him as to whether he was perfectly sure he saw it. I shall treat you just the same, and not try to argue whether a lover was really here this morning or whether it was an optical delusion due to an excited imagination disordered by a vivid dream," and there was a ring of fatherly kindness in his voice. "Don't bother your heads about it too much. There is plenty of trouble in this world, and if any is in store for you the fancying it has been foretold and straining your brain to guess what it is won't help you to bear it. Think of each other, and don't worry your heads over old wives' fables. There, good-bye to you both—an old man's blessing on you."

"I think he is right, Gerda. It is no use troubling over a dream. My child, I want to ask you one question: If Lord Ducie refuses his consent to our engagement what shall we do?"

"He can't refuse it!" she said, lovingly.

"What fault could he find with you?"

Iva smiled.

"Darling, I can't hope he will judge me with your eyes. We must face the future bravely, Gerda. Remember, if (I only say 'if,' you know) Lord Ducie refuses to sanction our engagement, this may be our last *à-tête* for a long time. Gerda, it seems to me we must admit the possibility of fate going against us, and shape our course."

The tears were in her eyes.

"You would give me up!"

"Never, while I live! Could you think it of me, Gerda? Don't you know, darling, that our love is not for days or weeks, but for all time?"

"They would never let us meet!"

"I fear not; and letters would be intercepted. Gerda, if we are parted, we must reckon on treachery being used against us. They may tell you cruel slanders of me; may try to make you believe I am faithless—fickle; nay, may assure you I weary of our love, and have set another in your place. Gerda, can you keep your faith in spite of this? Through such conflict of doubt and fear, darling, can you be true to me and to the truth we plighted in the chestnut walk this morning?"

"I can—I will!"

He took from his finger a signet ring, a bloodstone of great value, bearing the Ducie crest and motto.

"You cannot wear it," he said, fondly; "it would roll off these slender fingers; but you can keep it for a token. If fortune favours us, and we are allowed to meet as lovers, I will bring you a hoop of pearls, better suited for these tiny hands; but, Gerda, if we are

arked, this ring, from its very rareness, will be a token."

"A token of what?"

"It was my grandfather's," said Ralph, fondly, "and since his death it has never left my finger. I give it to you, my promised wife, until such time as I can place another on your finger, or—"

"We meet again."

"No," sadly, almost sternly; "or till the day dawns when you regret our engagement. Gerda, until this ring returns to me, directed by your hand, I shall regard you as my wife. They may tell me you are another's; they may forge a letter of farewell, and sign it with your name. Until you send me back my ring I shall believe that through all you are faithful to me."

"I shall never send it back."

"I do not think you will. If there is truth anywhere it is in your eyes."

"Iva!"

"My darling!"

"You have forgotten one thing," she said, wistfully. "You may get tired?"

"Of you? Never!"

"You may," she went on, slowly. "Think how little you know of me, counting by days and weeks. You will be free to go into the great world, and see its attractions. Oh, Iva! the chance is more that you will forget me than that I shall tire of you."

"I shall never forget you, dear."

"But if you did," she said, wistfully, "I would rather know. I couldn't bear that you should keep faithful to me just for pity sake when your heart was mine no longer. I have no ring to give you, but I have this."

It was a tiny sprig of heliotrope and maiden-hair which Sir James had cut for her in the conservatory.

She had tied it with a piece of cotton, and placed the posy in her bosom. She took it out now—poor fragrant little token!—and placed it in her lover's hand.

"I have no ring," she said, gently; "but take these flowers. If you repent of our engagement, if you meet a face which makes you forget mine, send me back this token. Withered and faded as it may be I shall recognise it."

He took the posy. He took something else—Gerda herself. He held her in his arms, and kissed her passionately on cheek and lip.

"You do not doubt me, Gerda?"

"Oh, no!"

"I love you so! Oh, my darling, I hope we are too desponding, and that your father, after all, will look indulgently on our love! Gerda, sweetheart, tell me once again you love me!"

"I love you!" said the young girl, raising her blushing face to his for one instant, and letting him read the secret in her eyes. "I love you, Iva, better than all the world beside!"

Poor young lovers—poor young hearts! In age, position, character, and looks, they were well-matched.

If any engagement ought to have met with general approbation it was that of Gerda and her far-off kinsman.

"I wish my mother were here," she said, softly.

"Your mother, sweetheart? I thought you could not remember her?"

"I cannot; but since I grew up I seem to have been wishing for her always; and, Iva, I never wanted her so much as now!"

"And I have not a relation in the world but your father. We stand strangely alone, Gerda!"

"It doesn't matter," she said, brightly. "I have you."

And so the clouds were swept away, and it was with a smiling face that Gerda mounted the terrace steps. Iva held her hand as they passed through the hall.

"I shall speak to your father after dinner!"

"I need not tell her?"

The emphasis was needless; he knew perfectly of whom she was thinking.

"No. Gerda, are you an early riser?"

"Yes."

"Would it be possible for you to meet me out-of-doors before breakfast?"

"Not out-of-doors. My lady might see us from her windows; but I will be in the library about eight o'clock."

She sped away, and with a strangely anxious spirit Iva watched her till she was lost to his view.

A true woman takes a certain interest in her own appearance. I don't mean she spends half her time and more money than she can afford on her toilet, but that a "nice" girl and a womanly woman (into which the girl usually develops) always like to look as well as they can.

Reader, it doesn't cost any more to make the best of yourself, and it is a remarkably good plan always to be fit to be seen at all times and seasons. It seems to me the truest compliment to those around us to strive ever to be a pleasant object to their eyes.

Lady Ducie (albeit neither a nice girl or a womanly woman) was an adept at dress.

Gerda had been in rather a disconsolate frame of mind, and her toilet had suffered accordingly.

She had argued that as her father had a beautiful wife to engross him it didn't matter what she wore.

To-night all was changed. Gerda had gone back to her old instinct of making herself look as well as she could. She delighted her maid by actually herself choosing one of the dainty costumes from her wardrobe, and then sending the girl to the garden to ask for some Parma violets, whose sweet scent caused them to be grown in goodly quantities in the Netherton conservatory.

She gazed at her own image in the glass, and wondered if Iva would think her fair. Hope and happiness had given a rich bloom to her delicate complexion. Her dress of frosted tulle was cut square in front, and finished off with soft filmy lace; among the folds of lace, and looping up the skirt, were bunches of the sweet, fragrant violets. She had no ornaments, not even a brooch or a string of pearls, and yet needed none—she looked perfection unadorned.

"My lord will be pleased to-night," said the maid, respectfully. "I never saw you look so well, Miss Gerda; and there's a party!"

"A party?"

"My lady thought it would be dull for Mr. Ducie, and she sent out invitations last night. It's not to call a regular party, Miss Gerda—just a few ladies and gentlemen. The covers are to be laid for twelve."

There was a question Gerda longed to put. She never gossiped with servants. Kind and considerate to all the establishment, except her kind old nurse Gerda was not given to speak to them unnecessarily, but she longed for once to depart from her custom, and ask Mary whether Laurence Ward was among her stepmother's guests.

"I suppose they are from Netherton?" she said, hurriedly. "Not staying guests?"

"From Netherton, Miss Gerda. A room has been got ready for Mr. Ward; all the others will return home."

"All?"

All pleasure in her own appearance faded—all hope died out of her heart. Why had Lady Ducie brought Laurence Ward so soon again to Netherton unless the two were plotting together against her peace?

If only she could gain a word with Iva—if only, at any rate, she could warn him of what had happened! Fortune, which in many things seemed hard on the lovers, in this favoured them. Just as Gerda was walking slowly down the long corridor she descried her cousin a little in advance of her.

"Iva!"

Just the one word in a faint, appealing voice, but it was enough to bring him. Turning back, he took Gerda's hand and led her into the first room whose door stood open—a rather handsomely appointed sitting-room.

There was no fire. Iva struck a match and lighted one of the lamps on the mantelpiece.

"My darling, what has happened?"

"He is here!"

"Who?"

"Laurence Ward!"

"A reason the more to tell our secret to your father, dearest. Don't let this distress you, Gerda. Don't you think I can protect my future wife from him?"

"You can do anything; but, Iva, I am not brave like you. I feel horribly frightened!"

"My poor child, you are trembling!"

"He will stay all night, Iva. You won't get an opportunity to speak to papa."

"Then I shall make one!"

"Can you?"

"Of course. You are fearful, Gerda. My darling, don't sigh so! Do you know when I first caught sight of you upon the stairs I thought you were a visitor from fairyland!"

She smiled.

"Ah! I thought you would like it!"

Iva calmly possessed herself of one of the bunches of violets, and, stooping down, he kissed the sweet, arched lips, passing his hand round her slender waist.

"Nothing can really harm us, Gerda, while we trust each other." Neither of them saw the evil face of Laurence Ward watching them at the open doorway.

A bell rang out its clanging summons. Their enemy quickly vanished, and Iva glanced at her.

"You would rather we did not go into the drawing-room together? Then I will follow and save you the offence of being last. Courage, my darling! Remember, whatever betide we have each other; no one can change our love!"

Her fingers trembled so violently she could hardly open the drawing-room door. She saw her father making conversation for some stately dowager; about half-a-dozen other people were scattered about, but of the two Gerda dreaded she saw no sign. Lady Ducie and Mr. Ward must either be late or have strolled into the conservatory.

Gerda sat down next Mrs. Sturgeess, and found the kindly chatter of the doctor's wife a convenient cover for her nervousness. She was a great favourite with the good lady, and had to listen to a great deal of information; for Mrs. Sturgeess had been away from Netherton almost ever since the arrival of the present Lady Ducie.

"So kind of your stepmother to write us, my dear," simpered the gentle old lady. "It is a real pleasure to me to come to the Chase, and I have been so much from home; it is ages since I saw you!"

"I did not know you had met Lady Ducie?"

"Oh, yes; I called before I left home, and to-night I hear we are to be introduced to your long-lost cousin. It must be quite delightful to him to meet such a charming family of relations."

"The relationship is very distant," said Gerda. "I fancy Iva and papa are second cousins."

"Iva? What a delightful name!"

"We think it pretty. See, here he comes now. He has quite a Ducie face!"

"Quite," said Mrs. Sturgeess, effusively. "I should like to have the pleasure of an introduction to him, Miss Ducie."

Gerda performed it at once, and threw enough friendliness into her tone, as she did so, for Iva to guess the doctor's wife was a favourite of hers.

Sitting down by the good lady he began to entertain her with praises of his cousin, a subject which suited them both.

The butler had announced dinner; Lord Ducie and the Dowager, who has been mentioned before, sailed out of the room; other couples, who had evidently received their instructions before, followed. A thrill of misery went through Gerda's heart as she heard her stepmother's voice.

"Mr. Ward, will you take my stepdaughter into dinner?"

Someone had long since appropriated Mrs. Sturgess; Lady Ducie herself took Iva's arm. It is possible the young man might have evaded her, and rescuing Gerda from Mr. Ward, left Lady Ducie to the care of her own *protégé*; but, alas! both the poor young lovers were almost spellbound—until that moment neither had caught sight of the mistress of the Chase; now she stood before them arrayed in floating robes of black lace, a shower of silver stars relieving the sombreness of her attire, and deep red flowers at her breast.

Was it wonderful Gerda and Iva were helpless to resist her plans, and seemed as though spellbound? for it flashed upon them both at the same moment—this was her costume in Iva's dream.

(To be continued.)

BUT NOT OUR HEARTS.

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHEN do you say they come back?"

Max Lonsdale asked the question of Lady Dorothy as he sauntered along at her side through the garden at Westcourt, where the starry primroses were peeping out, and the modest violets perfumed the air, and the snow-drops showed their white petals.

He put the question carelessly, yet his eyes wore a mixed look of interest and something else, that was almost like fear. And yet what had this gallant son of Mars to fear from the return of his cousin, whom he had not seen for many months, since, in fact, that time previous to her marriage when he had been at Westcourt before? He hardly knew what he feared. His thoughts had assumed no very tangible form, and yet there was something on his mind that told him it would be better for him never to look again on the fair face of the woman who was Washington C. Spragg's wedded wife.

"When do you say they come back?" he repeated.

"The day after to-morrow," returned her ladyship, briefly.

"To Temple Dane?"

"Yes. Where else do you imagine they would go?"

"He has a town house, has he not?"

"He has; but Opal does not like London."

"Ah! he consults her wishes in everything."

"Of course. Most men would consult the wishes of such a woman, wouldn't they?"

"I should think so."

"You would, for instance?" shooting a sharp glance at him.

"Certainly," he agreed, nonchalantly. "It would be a duty and a pleasure."

"Humph! Pleasure? You nearly made a fool of yourself that summer at Branksome Brae, didn't you?"

"I did, and my only regret is that it wasn't nearly, but quite."

"Why?"

"Need you ask?"

"Certainly I need. You speak in riddles."

"I should have saved her from the awful fate of marrying that mummy-like fellow."

"The mummy-like fellow is well gilded."

"Opal is not the sort of girl to care about that."

"And you are conceited enough to think that she would be better off as your wife than his, eh?"

"I think she would be happier."

"Your income is not very great."

"True. My love for her would have been, though."

"Humph! You're rather far gone."

"Was. Put it in the past tense. I don't forget that she belongs to another now."

"Is it in the past tense?" demanded the old lady, stopping and facing him. "You men are geese sometimes where women are concerned."

"Of course it's in the past tense," he rejoined, hotly.

"I'm not so sure, Max," she said, slowly, eyeing him keenly, in a way that was anything save pleasant.

"I am."

"You may deceive yourself."

"Is it likely that a man of my age would do that?"

"Quite likely. A man of your age, when he falls in love, doesn't get over it easily; when a youth plunges headlong into an *affaire de cœur*, its calf-love, and, like the measles, isn't dangerous."

"Ah!"

"Don't you think I am right?"

"Perhaps you are?"

"And if you are not sure of yourself, Max, you'd better go away. I don't want to seem inhospitable, and you know there's Branksome Brae at your disposal; but it won't do to let her get an inkling of the state of your feelings towards her."

"You need not fear, aunt, I am master of myself."

"I am glad to hear it. You see she is partial to you, and it would only add to her grief to think she had innocently given you pain."

"She is not happy, then?" he said, questioningly.

"Not quite," returned her ladyship, evasively.

"Poor girl!"

"You see," she went on, quickly, "she never got over Chichester's loss."

"I can understand that. It was very sad."

"And her whole heart and soul were wrapped up in him. She could never forget him."

"No. Nothing was ever heard of him?"

"I am not so sure of that," rejoined Lady Dorothy, with a significant nod of the head.

"What do you mean?"

"Cope has received one or two mysterious letters from abroad."

"Who told you that?"

"Ruby. She went over to The Rest a short time ago, and now, being a *grande dame*, marched straight into his sanatorium unannounced. He was busy perusing some sheets of foreign note-paper, and she declares (for she got a good look at them before he scrambled them up) that the writing was Chichester's."

"They may have been old letters."

"No, they weren't. Jenny, cross-examined, acknowledged that a thin wafery letter arrived that morning addressed to Miss Vane, and that her master seized upon it at once, and threatened her on pain of instant dismissal not to say a word about it. But she wasn't proof against one of these," and her ladyship held up a sovereign.

"Indeed. This is extraordinary, and ought to be inquired into."

"So I thought, therefore I paid a visit to the amiable Cope, and did my best to find out the truth."

"With what results?" asked Lonsdale, eagerly.

"No results. He fenced, and parried, and lied to such an extent—and you know with what cool audacity he can lie—that I came away not one whit the wiser than I went."

"What can be done?"

"Nothing, I think. We can only wait and see what time will do. If Chichester be alive he will find his way to Opal's home sooner or later, you may be sure."

"I suppose so. He was very fond of her?"

"Fond of her? That's much too tame and mild a word. He simply adored her. To see him look at her with those soft blue eyes of his, so full of tenderness and affection, always made me feel—though I've not much feeling in this dried-up old pippin"—and she thumped herself with vigour over the region of the heart—"sentimental, actually sentimental and foolish, and ready to do anything to help them to marry, and enjoy their 'love in a cottage,' despite that king of marplots, Cope Vane."

"I can't understand how it was Opal was unfaithful to his memory. She struck me as

being such a steadfast, true kind of girl, one not likely to forget a dead lover," observed Max, reflectively.

"Neither is she. Don't you know Cope's capabilities?" snapped her ladyship.

"For what?" interrogated her nephew.

"For lying, slandering, and evil speaking."

"Yes. I am aware that he is not strictly truthful."

"Strictly truthful!" she groaned. "Why he'd rather tell a tarradiddle than the truth."

"Indeed. Then did he blacken Chichester to Opal?"

"Yes."

"How do you know? Did she tell you so?"

"No. She is not the sort of girl to speak of a thing of that kind, but she persistently refused Spragg, and then suddenly yielded to her father's entreaties to marry him. That struck me as curious; and then the amiable Cope threw out sundry mysterious hints about Paul being a scoundrel, hardly fit to live, &c., and declared she had had a great escape in not becoming his wife. She looked more broken-hearted after she had accepted Spragg too, so putting one thing and another together I am certain Cope told her some story that was not to the young man's credit."

"What an infamous thing! to slander the dead!"

"Isn't it?"

"I wish we could ascertain the truth about this. I should like to be able to tell Opal that her lover was good and true."

"I daresay you would. But it won't do, Max, it won't do."

"Why not?"

"You'd better not mix yourself up in the affair."

"Why not?" he repeated.

"Because you love her—that's why."

"Supposing I don't admit that?"

"It doesn't matter to me what you admit. I know you do, and that's enough. Still, if you go poking and prying about her affairs she'll wonder what reason you have for doing it, and then she might arrive at the real one, and, as I told you before, that would pain her."

"I don't wish to cause her one moment's sorrow."

"That's right," with an approving nod; "she's suffered a great deal."

"Yes, poor child," he murmured, with infinite tenderness.

"When Billie died her grief was something awful."

"I don't wonder at that. He was a sweet boy, and so much attached to her. Then he must have been such a consolation to her in her unhappy marriage. He was a sort of link that bound her to the old life, and when he died that was snapped asunder, and she was adrift from all that was past, with nothing save memories, more sad than joyful, to live on."

"True. Her face was the saddest thing I've ever seen, even in my long life, as she hung over the coffin in which the little fellow lay, with his waxen fingers full of snowy blooms, and his long lashes curving in a dusky line on his pale cheeks."

"Poor Opal! I wish she could regain her lost happiness."

"I wish she could, but fear it isn't possible."

"If her dear ones were alive again she might be."

"No. You forget Mr. Spragg."

"Ah! yes. He is an insurmountable stumbling block," he said, with a heavy sigh.

"What do you think she will say to this marriage of Vane?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" he echoed in surprise.

"No. It won't affect her."

"Of course not. Still the boys—"

"The boys don't have much to do with their father now. They are in Mr. Spragg's care, and only spend part of their holidays at

The Rest. Besides, I must say that Mrs. Davidson is a very genial, good-tempered sort of woman, and will probably look after them better than he would."

"Then, on the whole, you approve of the match?"

"For him. I can't say as to her. Time alone can show that. Of course Cope's only marrying her—or rather he isn't marrying her—he's really taking unto himself the silver mine."

"Ah! I see," pityingly.

"Well, if it turns out that the mine was all the dear departed Jonathan's, things will go smoothly enough, for though she won't have a Bonanza, still she'll be worth a plum; but if, as I shrewdly suspect, it was only partly his, then of course, her income will be a few hundreds a year."

"Vane will find that out before the knot is tied."

"I hardly think he will. He is eager to marry money, and like a greedy shark that snaps at the pork, and swallows the hook, he will find himself caught and tied for life to a woman who is idiotically and inconveniently in love with him, who is full-blown, forty, and somewhat vulgar."

"I see," said Lonsdale again; "and I understand now why you don't think the affair will turn out well for her."

"Humph! You do know something of him, then."

"A little."

"Then you know what she has to expect if she goes to him empty-handed. And now, Max, I must go in. The dew is beginning to fall heavily, and I have to write to Ruby with reference to this new French maid for Opal;" and, gathering up her train, Lady Dorothy walked off to her library, and indited an epistle to the Countess.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"You can go now. You understand your duties fully?"

"Yes, madame."

"Very well," and with a wave of her hand the Countess of Mount Severn dismissed from her presence the woman she had engaged for her sister—a short, full-figured *Parisienne*, with masses of inky hair, bold, dark eyes, and a startlingly red mouth.

Turk, who was present at the interview in the green room, and who lay on the bearskin rug, with his head close to the savage-looking stuffed one, got up as she passed him on her way out, and sniffed her gown, eyeing her distrustfully; while she, looking at him, muttered between her teeth, with strange venom,—

"*Méchante bête!*"

"I don't like that woman," said Ruby decidedly, as the door closed on Valerie Cofin.

"Why not?" asked Lady Dorothy, looking up from her perusal of the *Times*.

"There is something peculiar about her."

"In what way?"

"She gives me the impression that she is acting a part; that she is something better than a servant, and that with all her deferential and polite manner she would like to break out, and insolently declare herself our equal."

"A strange notion!"

"She is a strange woman."

"She seems to know all the duties of a lady's maid thoroughly, from the way she answered your questions."

"True."

"And may prove a good servant."

"She may. I doubt it. She would never suit me."

"Then—you are very different to Opal."

"Very. Probably she won't take the trouble to look twice at this curious, black-browed Gaul."

"Probably not."

"I should never take my eyes off her."

"Why?"

"Because there is something fascinating in

that bold, good-looking, swarthy countenance. Unpleasantly fascinating, I mean. She has a keen look, a way of dropping her lids, when she meets your glance, that would make me quake for my diamonds, and decidedly keep the key of the jewel-box myself."

"Were her references satisfactory?"

"They were written ones."

"I like verbal characters."

"So do I. But the time was so short, and Washington telegraphed a maid must be engaged by to-night, therefore I had little choice, especially as he particularised that she must be a *Parisienne*."

"Just so. Where did you hear of her first?"

"From Claremont. You know he did not go to America with them, though how Mr. Spragg consented to part with his beloved valet I don't know."

"He thinks a great deal of him!"

"Yes; I can't imagine why."

"He was one of the old stock."

"Hardly that. Fishlake Chicherly picked him up in Paris two years before he died—"

"Or was murdered," put in Lady Dorothy.

"Or was murdered," repeated Ruby, "and made a great deal of him too. Now anyone old Chicherly thought much of must be bad to my way of thinking."

"That is not quite a just conclusion to come to."

"Perhaps not, yet it is a true one. Have you noticed this man?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Well, do so now. I will ring and order tea."

"That won't bring him."

"Yes it will. Benson comes for orders, and it is Claremont's almost invariable custom to bring in the afternoon tea."

"That is a queer thing for a valet to do."

"So I think, and I asked Opal why he did it. She said it was because Mr. Spragg generally takes a sherry cobbler, a mint julep, or something of that kind, between four and five, and that he mixed it better than the butler or the footman, and so won his master's goodwill, who after awhile got into the habit of asking for him if he didn't appear. I believe the fellow pushed himself forward with some design. He wants to get an opportunity of listening to the conversation, or something of that sort."

"His position does not enable him to do that."

"It should not; but it is no uncommon occurrence for him to appear at dinner, and obsequiously offer his master one of those everlasting American drinks to which he is so partial."

"Humph!"

"Look at him well," and Ruby touched the jewelled bell at her side.

"You rang, miss," said Benson, putting his bulbous nose inside the door, and forgetting, as usual, that Ruby had blossomed into a married woman and a countess.

"Will you send up tea, and tell Claremont to prepare a sherry cobbler for your master. I expect they will arrive now every minute."

"Yes, miss—I mean my lady," mumbled Benson, disappearing.

"That will fetch our man."

And true enough it did. A few moments later the valet appeared, bearing a silver tray, on which stood a high glass, filled with ice and sherry, and garnished with straws; a tea-urn, and the identical Salopian cups out of which they had sipped bohea on the last time that Paul had entertained them at his old home.

"Is that mixed in your best style?" asked the Countess, to attract his attention, while her aunt studied attentively the handsome Frenchman from the crown of his sleek, dark head to the sole of his small, shapely foot.

"Oui, madame," he returned with an airy wave of his hands. "My verree best."

"That is right. Your master will no doubt be both tired and thirsty on his arrival."

"Doubtless, madame, and these ese so *ra-fratchissant*, so *délicieux*, so—"

But he got no further in his flowery speech, for Turk had woke up, and was making for him with his usual savage growl, and with such rapidity that the valet had to fly to save himself from the nip of those sharp teeth.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Lady Dorothy.

"The fellow's a coward."

"He is. Still I hardly blame him under the circumstances for taking flight. Turk is a formidable assailant; aren't you, old fellow?" patting his great head.

"I should not care to have those fangs fastened in my throat. What makes the dog go at him like that?"

"I can't tell. He always did it. When he was a puppy at The Rest, and Claremont used to bring us flowers from his master, he used to rush at him snarling."

"It is very strange."

"Extraordinary. He has an intense antipathy for the man, and my theory is that he is a murderer."

"Ruby! my dear!"

"Don't look so horrified, aunt," she smiled. "Turk is not a pure-bred mastiff; he has a good deal of the Cuban bloodhound in him. The officer who gave him to poor Paul brought a brace of the hounds over from Cuba, and Master Turk is the offspring of one. You know it is said that those dogs never fail to detect a murderer."

"I have heard so."

"And I believe it now, after his performances."

"Not a nice reflection to think Washington harbours a murderer."

"No. Honestly, what do you think of the confidential body-servant?"

"Honestly, I don't like his appearance."

"Yet he is handsome."

"Decidedly so. Those dark liquid eyes do great execution among the maids, I've little doubt. Still, I should not care to be the man who stood in his way, nor the woman of whom he had tired."

"Nor I," returned Ruby, significantly.

"Don't you think we ought to give Washington a hint?"

"Of what?"

"That—that—"

"That I think him a murderer, because the dog flies at him? No, it would be absurd, as we have no proof. The best thing to do is to watch him as closely as we can, and the new maid also."

"Perhaps that is the best to go on."

"I think it is."

"Have you every thing weedy faw the twavellaws?" demanded the Earl, who had been out on the terrace smoking a cigar with Max.

"Why?"

"Because they awe coming. Just tawned the cawwaw."

"Yes, ewverything is weedy," returned his wife, mimicking him in the coolest way imaginable. "Don't excite yourself," but he had turned away, and was welcoming the arrivals cordially.

"This is good of you all to come here," said Opal, sinking into a chair, and throwing aside her heavily-plumed hat, "and welcome us, back."

"Why good? We wanted to see you," said Lady Dorothy, kissing her.

"Are you tired?" asked Ruby, standing he side her.

"Not at all. We had quite a pleasant journey."

"I am glad you did not find it fatiguing," smiled Spragg, helping her off with her gloves.

"Are you?" she returned, in such a kindly way that some of the onlookers were astonished—notably, Lady Dorothy and Max.

But Opal had adhered to her good resolutions, and suppressing her dislike for her husband, showing nothing save unvarying gentleness towards him, which filled him with delight, made him hope all yet would be well between them. His happiness made him look

younger and better. He wore quite a jaunty air as he handed the tiny tea-cups to the ladies, and chatted about his travels; and Ruby whispered to her aunt, "They are better friends," and the old lady murmured back, "Yes," and then fell to wondering what the result would be if it turned out Chichester was alive, and if he came to disturb the budding serenity and peace of the master of Temple Dene.

And while she wondered, and Spragg chatted, and Ruby and Opal compared notes, and the Earl vacantly stared at the ceiling, Max found himself silently studying the exceeding loveliness of his cousin's face.

She had improved in some respects, was fuller and more queenly in bearing, more graceful; but she was wild-eyed, he saw, now, and nervous, and kept down her feelings with a strong effort.

Yet this wild-eyed, graceful woman was more to his liking than the timid girl had been; and as he gazed at her he felt that though he might not admit to anyone else that he loved her, it would be quite useless to disguise that unpleasant fact from himself, as his feelings betrayed him; and when Spragg, with his usual genial hospitality, said, "You are all going to stay and have dinner here, of course?" he felt inclined to cry out, "No, no, I must not stay. I have no right, for I love that pale, beautiful woman sitting there, the woman who is your wife, and I dare not remain near her." Yet he did, and took her down to dinner and sat at her right hand, and listened to her sweet voice, drinking in its music with hungry ears, and making matters worse for himself.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It would have been better for Max had he gone away at once, have fled from the spell of the enchantress; but he found it hard to do so. He was fair, like Paul, and instinctively she turned to him, sought his society, and consolation in it, for she had a tender, sisterly affection for her cousin, and enjoyed long chats, or rides, or drives with him.

Nothing pleased her more than to don her habit, mount Bluebell, and ride away beside him for miles over the moors, where the keen, salt breath of the sea swept by, and the wild fowl winged their flight over the springing heather. She did not guess the danger there was in this close intercourse for him, did not dream he cared for her one whit more than he ought.

He controlled himself wonderfully. The "china blue" eyes met hers calmly, his hands did not tremble as they touched hers, he gave no sign of the passion that stirred his heart, uttered no word she might not hear.

Mr. Spragg looked on at the friendliness that existed between the cousins with great approval. He honestly liked Max; then he was a Colonel, a man of position, on terms of intimacy with many of the nobility, and therefore worthy of much respect, and he was glad to see Opal take an interest in anything, so he pressed Lonsdale to come to Temple Dene whenever he liked, and to stay there in a way which the man who envied him one thing he possessed found it impossible to refuse. There was no apparent reason why he should not go, and he feared that refusing might arouse suspicion, so he braced himself for the ordeal, and went constantly.

The mummy seemed to think no entertainment complete without "the Colonel," and insisted on his being present at the dinner he gave to his neighbours, another given in honour of Copeland Vane and his intended bride, Mrs. Davidson, and a third to which his own transatlantic friends were chiefly asked, and which, somehow or other, was not quite such a success as the first two.

"Are you fond of so much gaiety?" Max asked Opal, the morning following the Yankee dinner, as they walked to the cemetery, laden with flowers.

"No," she answered, "I should prefer a quieter life."

"Then why don't you tell Mr. Spragg so?" he asked in astonishment.

"He likes entertaining his friends. It gives him much pleasure, and I would not deprive him of that for the world."

But his greatest pleasure is to please you, I am sure," expostulated her companion, who had noticed the American's devotion to his wife.

"I am aware of that, and I am also aware that if he knew I did not like gaiety, he would not ask a creature to Temple Dene."

"Then why don't you tell him?"

"Because I would not deprive him of any enjoyment he derives from seeing his friends. I did him a great injustice when I married him, and all I can do now is to humour any whim he has, and bend my wishes to his."

"You mean—you do not love him?"

She bowed her head without looking up.

"I did it for his sake," she said, pointing at Billie's grave, while the tears gathered thickly on her dark lashes.

"That was excuse enough," remarked Max, as he placed a wreath of white roses on the marble cross.

"I hardly think so," she answered, shaking her head.

"A woman is cruel to marry a man who loves her very much, and for whom she does not care. It is a long agony to him to live beside one who is ice to his fire."

"Other men suffer as great agony, sometimes, craving for a love they cannot win. At least a husband has the joy of possession, the knowledge that the object he adores is bound to him by the closest tie on earth."

"That is little good. There is no happiness for a man who is shut out from his wife's affection."

"Perhaps so. Which is the worst, do you think, to love too much, or to love too little?"

"To love too little," she answered, with a sad smile.

"And I think to love too much."

"I cannot understand that."

"Can you not understand a man craving and longing for an affection that can never be his?—sighing for a smile from fair lips, a glance from bright eyes, restraining his feelings, keeping down his instincts with an iron hand, and living a horrible life? That is loving too much."

"That must be wretched."

"Some men love in that way."

"They are much to be pitied."

"Ay, truly they are," he agreed, with a hoarse laugh, his burning eyes fixed on her lovely face. "What would you do?" he went on, "if you were a man and you cared for another man's wife so much that life was a misery to you, an empty, dreary, colourless affair? If you thought of her by day, dreamt of her by night, longed for the touch of her hand, the sound of her voice, as the Arab dying in the arid desert longs for water? If each day as the sun rose you could wish yourself dead ere it set, rather than live and see her another?"

"I—I—hardly know," she faltered, startled by his vehemence.

"Would you stay at her side, drinking deep draughts from the intoxicating cup of her presence, or would you leave her, and fly to the utmost ends of the earth to escape temptation?"

"I would fly to the utmost ends of the earth," she returned, quietly, and firmly recovering her calmness, "rather than jeopardise my own honour, and the peace and happiness of the woman I loved."

"You are right," he said, after a moment's pause. "A man would be a coward, a miserable poltroon, who would consider his own happiness before that of the woman he adores."

"Shall we go back?" he asked abruptly, and Opal assenting, they walked back in silence.

The next day Colonel Lonsdale left Temple Dene, and a week later he rejoined his regi-

ment, which was ordered out on active service to the Transvaal.

Mr. Spragg loudly bewailed his departure, declaring he should miss him immensely—he was the nicest fellow he knew, and wishing he could have stayed over for the shooting.

His loud grumbling made up for his wife's silence, and no one noticed that she did not utter one word of regret at her cousin's departure, which might have caused some astonishment, as her partiality for him was well known.

"So Max has left you?" said Ruby, as she entered the octagon room at Westcote, some days after his departure.

"Yes. And quite time he did go," snapped Lady Dorothy.

"Why?" asked her niece amazedly. "I thought he was such a favourite of yours, that you always liked to have him with you?"

"So he is. Still I don't like to see a man make a fool of himself."

"Has our gallant cousin been doing that?" inquired the Countess, desisting from her operation of peeling off an enormously long pair of grey gloves.

"Yes."

"How?"

"Oh, in the usual way, over a woman."

"Some of the dairy maids or country wenches about, I presume," she suggested, going on with the peeling.

"Yes," said the old lady aloud. Adding to herself, "if you choose to think so."

"Ah! I had no idea he was of amorous propensities. I always thought he was one of those fishy sort of people who never get beyond adoring themselves."

"Did you?" sarcastically.

"I did, I assure you. I believed him utterly incapable of experiencing a great passion."

"You were wrong then."

"So it seems. Are you going to tell me all about it?" continued the Countess, settling herself comfortably to hear a string of scandal.

"No," returned Lady Dorothy, shortly.

"Why not?"

"For the very simple, but very sufficient reason, I don't know 'all about it.'"

"Oh! I see. Max's love affair is wrapped in impenetrable mystery."

"Just so."

"Then we won't say anything more about it."

"No. Tell me what you have come for?"

"To talk about Opal and Paul Chichester."

"Opal and Paul?"

"Yes."

"What about them?"

"I am sure he is alive."

"Ruby!"

"Yes," nodding her head decidedly.

"Another letter reached The Rest to-day, addressed to Miss Vane."

"Did Jennie tell you that?"

"She did; and, what is more, she put it in her pocket, and here it is," laying a sheet of paper on the table.

Lady Dorothy snatched it up eagerly, and perused it.

It was a passionate, almost broken-hearted appeal from Paul Chichester, begging for a line from the woman he loved—only one line—to say she was well and unchanged with regard to him, and asking why she had not answered the two letters already sent to her, that he had written from the Falkland Isles and America, and repeating his entreaties to her not to be offended, and assuring her that he had not lost his senses after being shipwrecked he would have written before, and told her of his whereabouts.

The letter concluded with declarations of undying love, and the information that he would hasten to The Rest at once, and forget all his past sufferings and hardships in the great joy of seeing her again.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed her ladyship, laying down the letter, and looking

blankly at her companion. "Cope has destroyed those letters, and what are we to do?"

"That is what I want to know," returned Ruby. "Do you think I was wrong to open that?"

"No, certainly not. It would never do to let it fall suddenly into Opal's hands. The shock would be terrible."

"Yes. Still she must be told."

"Of course, and at once, or he will arrive here, and an awful scene ensue."

"Just so."

"We had better drive over to Temple Dene now—your carriage is waiting—and break the news as gently as possible to her—prepare her for his arrival. You see he may come at any minute. This," referring to the letter, "was written at Liverpool the day before yesterday!"

"True. But she is safe to-day."

"How?"

"She has gone to London with Mr. Spragg."

"Are you sure?"

"She told me yesterday she was going. He wishes her to choose a new suite of pearls."

"I see. When will they return?"

"Not before to-morrow afternoon."

"Then we will be there to receive her, and tell this pleasant, yet unpleasant, news."

"It will upset her terribly."

"I fear so; and she was just beginning to get on better with her husband. They have both looked happier since their trip to Boston. Now this will open the old wound, bring back the old sorrow and regret, and Heaven only knows what will happen. I am glad the poor young man is alive, and yet bitterly sorry for Opal," and Lady Dorothy wrung her hands, and stood looking the image of distress; while Ruby tried to console her by saying that they might be able to make matters fairly straight by their united efforts to-morrow.

(To be continued.)

YOUNG MARRIED PEOPLE.—The honeymoon is not all honey; and marriage is sometimes said to be the door that leads deluded mortals back to earth; but this need not and ought not to be the case. Certainly love may end with the honeymoon if people marry to gratify a "gunpowder passion," or for the sake of mere outward beauty, which is like a glass soon broke. Of course the enthusiastic, tempestuous love of courting days will not as a rule survive marriage. A married couple soon get to feel towards each other very much as two chums at college, or two partners in a business who are at the same time old and well-tried friends. Young married people often think that those who have been in the holy state of matrimony twenty or thirty years longer than themselves are very prosy, unromantic, and by no means perfect examples of what married people ought to be.

RURAL LIFE.—Both town and country have their own advantages. In the country one has nature; in the city, activity. In the country, vegetation; in the city, emulation. In the country, leisure, but no advantages; in the city, advantages, but no leisure. In the country, danger of rusting out; in the city, certainty of wearing out. In the country, life sometimes wearisomely slow; in the city, life always painfully fast. In the country you make friends, in the city acquaintances; in the country you know all but a few neighbours, in the city jostle against innumerable strangers; in the country you live in undress, in the city you are always on dress parade; in the country you rest, in the city you work; the country is God's Sabbath, the city man's week-day. The country is God-made, the city man-made; in the country are birds, in the city orchestras; in the country flowers, in the city dresses; in the country sunsets, in the city art collections; in the country stars, in the city gas lights. Strike your balance.

THE WEDDING CAKE.

—3:—

THE doctor had a pretty daughter,
And many lads had tried
To woo her for a sweetheart
And win her for a bride;
But she was very well content
To be her father's pride.

Studying in the doctor's office
Was a talented young man;
He had loved the doctor's daughter
Since his studies there began;
And the doctor said with favour:
"You may win her if you can."

But Jessie was a coy young miss;
The wooing did not speed;
And all his earnest love for her
She did not seem to heed;
They quarrelled every time they met;
Where could such courtship lead?

One morning pretty Jessie stood,
Sleeves up and plump arms bare,
And looked down in the big cake bowl,
With anxious, puzzled air;
For baking cake was Jessie's pride,
And housekeeping her care.

"Shall it be gold or silver cake?
Or sponge or angel food?"
She mused aloud; Fred, coming in,
Said: "Angel food is good,
If it's for you, but not for me;
You could please me, if you would."

And Jessie, always glad to please,
Asked him: "Which shall I bake?
"I'll make just what you want." Said he:
"My own choice may I take?
"Then, since you leave it all to me,
Make us a wedding cake."

"You took advantage of me there
Unfairly," Jessie said,
"Twas your own offer, sweetheart mine,"
Triumphantly said Fred.
And she did make a wedding cake
Next month, when they were wed.

A. K.

THE SHADOW OF A CRIME.

CHAPTER IX.

FIVE YEARS AFTER.

FIVE years have passed since that night on which the landlady had discovered Edith prostrate on the floor of her room, to which she had been attracted by the sound of her fall, after which for two long months she lay between life and death, with the remembrance of her crime forming horrid phantoms around her bed; but youth overcame the latter, who had fought so hard for the victory, and though but the shadow of her former self, she once more arose to fight the battle of life.

Her last trinket had been disposed of, and it was imperative as soon as she was able that she should obtain a situation without delay.

This she did as housekeeper to an elderly gentleman, where the pay was liberal and the duties light.

Although the buoyant spirits of her youth had left her for ever, still time had worked wonders, and so cloudy was her brain at the time that after five years, and to no one was the story of her guilt discovered, that she even brought herself to believe it could but have been the phantasy of an overwrought imagination.

But being in the vicinity of Church-street one afternoon it suddenly occurred to her the invitation which Mrs. Newton had given her so long ago, and she determined to enter the shop.

"Is Mrs. Newton in?" she asked of a lad who stood behind the counter serving customers.

He was about fifteen, with a bright look on his countenance, and a smile when he spoke, which caused Edith to start, but it was only a memory, and, on his leaving the shop to tell the former she was wanted, she recovered herself, but when she heard him address the same as aunt a strange tremor passed through her frame.

At first Mrs. Newton did not recognise her, but, as Edith brought herself to her remembrance,—

"Lor, yes! Well, who would have thought it" she said; "after all these years too? But come in," and, determined to take no refusal, she insisted on Edith entering the inner room to have, as she said, a good chat.

"Well, and what have you been doing all this time?" she asked. "And how was it you didn't come before?"

"I was very ill soon after that night when I last saw you," said Edith, replying to the last question first, "and when I recovered I found it necessary that I should seek a situation."

"And what about the baby?" asked Mrs. Newton.

"She is dead," was the reply.

And seeing the tears about to start to the mother's eyes Mrs. Newton refrained from asking further, whilst she continued,—

"You remember what I told you about my sister's children? Well, I was as good as my word. I soon found them out, and they are now living with me," and calling to Bill, who was in the shop. "Come here," said Mrs. Newton, on which the former made his appearance. "Now, isn't he a fine fellow?" she asked, proudly. "And—Hullo! I declare here's Paul home from school!" she added, as a little fellow of twelve entered the room, with his bag of books slung across his shoulder.

And the boy stood for a few moments, seemingly uncertain as to his next movement, whilst he took in the scene; then, rushing to where Edith sat, he threw his arms around her neck.

"You won't leave us now, Edie, will you?" he cried, whilst his tears fell on her shoulder. "Bill, ask her not to go away," and then he turned to where his brother still stood, whilst his aunt remained an astonished spectator of the scene.

"Edith Pegram! my niece! Is it possible?" she at last exclaimed, when after awhile she recovered from the surprise the discovery occasioned her, and no one but Paul here to have known her after all this time.

But the latter only smiled gladly into the face of his sister, with his head still resting on her shoulder, as she listened to his story of how they had grieved when, on the morning succeeding her flight from Hillside, they arose to find her gone; and then her tears mingled with his, as he told her how their mother was never the same afterwards, but that she became so ill, and then died—the doctors said of a broken heart.

"Oh; mother, poor mother!" sobbed Edith; "but tell me, Bill, where is she buried?"

"In Hillside churchyard," replied the boy, as he begged the former not to cry so bitterly, "under the cypress tree she loved so much. But she was not angry with you, Edith," he added, "for she prayed for you to the last."

Mrs. Newton, to whom afterwards all was explained, had been called away to the shop, but it was a happy family which that evening was gathered together in the little parlour which adjoined the same, and a glimpse of a new-born bliss had dawned in the bosom of Edith, as later on she retraced her steps homeward.

CHAPTER X.

BY HER MOTHER'S GRAVE.

THE next morning she asked permission of her employer to allow her a day's holiday, as she would much wish to visit some friends in the country; and her request being complied

with, it was early when Edith once more found herself steaming away towards Hillside.

It was a lovely morning, each tree and hedgerow telling of the fast-advancing summer, filling the soft air with the fragrance of their new-born freshness, and the girl who had known such sorrow in her few years of life experienced a sense of happiness to which she had so long been a stranger.

She had brought with her sweet flowers from the choicest to be obtained, and as she stepped from the carriage to the platform of the village station many an eye was attracted to her black-robed figure, above which the golden hair formed a halo of light; but Edith was blind to the admiration she called forth, as she was deaf to the many compliments passed on her appearance, when the train again rushed on, and she emerged from the little terminus.

As she entered on the road the church, which was but a short distance from the former, became distinctly visible, and sad memories in the past flitted through her brain, causing the tears to well to her eyes as she neared the same.

There were few people about, and those who were merely passed a look of surprise as they went by at the lovely flowers carried by the fair stranger, who felt a relief when at last she had reached her destination.

How peaceful all seemed within that holy boundary as she passed through the gate to the resting-place of the dead, from whose silent beds the perfume of violets and primroses exhaled their fragrance, whilst the birds overhead burst out in songs of praise!

Stepping lightly over the fresh-gravelled pathway Edith passed on to the spot mentioned by her brothers, and indicated by a plain white stone, bearing the name, age, and date of death, she discovered the grave of her mother.

Seating herself on the beloved mound she carefully selected the lovely blossoms, which she at once commenced to arrange in the form of a wreath, the tears she could not suppress ever and anon falling on their tender leaves, until at last, her task completed and the emblem of love placed on the white stone, a sense of drowsiness came over her, and, resting her head on the green grass, she fell asleep, with the sun kissing her fair face and the songs of birds sounding in her ears.

How long she had thus remained she knew not, but after a time a consciousness, which even in her sleep made her feel she was not alone, suddenly aroused her, when, on opening her eyes with a slight scream she could not suppress, they fell on the form of John Hartman, and by his side a child, whose golden ringlets were tossed and caressed by the summer's breeze.

"Oh, papa, oo have frightened de purty lady!" said the little one; but Jack told her to go away and play by herself for a little while and the pretty lady would soon be well, and, as the child not very willingly obeyed, Edith arose to her feet.

"You do not fear me, Edith?" he asked, reaching out his hand to assist her. "I would not harm you, my love; whilst I thank Heaven that you are alive!"

But for a time she was unable to answer him, as, like one dazed she stood, the memories of that fearful night on which she and Jack had last met like a millstream rushed to her brain with all the horrors which until then she had almost ceased to remember.

"No, no," she answered; "I know you would not harm me; but I am not fit to clasp the hand of such as you—who are all goodness, and I who killed her," and she pointed to her mother's grave, "I who murdered—"

"No, Edith, no," said Jack, before she could finish the word. "Don't say that, my darling, for Heaven in its goodness saved you that crime. You were mad—not answerable for your actions; but you were innocent of that great sin."

"Is it true? Tell me, Jack, is it true?" and,

in her excitement, throwing herself at his feet, she clasped his knees, whilst the tears streamed down her white face, repeating the while, "is it true that my child was saved?"

"Yes, Edith, and is living still."

"Heaven be praised!" was all she could utter, when falling back on the green grave her eyes closed, and for the moment John Hartman feared that she was dead; but placing his hand on her heart he felt that it still beat, and, as a gentle wind fanned her temples, he could see a quiver of the snowy lids, and when she again opened her eyes he was still kneeling by her side.

The first shock she had felt on seeing him having passed Edith had so far recovered that she could calmly listen as Jack told her, how on the night she had so madly rushed to the river he had followed in the dim light, unconscious of whose child he had rescued from a watery grave until later on, when finding her crouching with her eyes wildly peering from where she had hidden he took her for protection to the cottage, from which she afterwards escaped.

"But my little girl—my baby—what of her?" Edith asked.

"I took her, Edith," was the reply, "and I learnt to love her as once I fondly loved—"

But he did not complete his sentence, for Edith knew the name he would have uttered, when, taking his hand within her own, she implored him to forgive her in the past, whilst he, drawing her nearer, nearer, until her head rested on his broad shoulder, told her of the love which had never died; and a little, golden-haired fairy appeared, gazing wonderingly at the strange scene, as Edith tore herself from Jack's embrace to clasp in her arms the form of the child she so long had mourned as dead.

Little remains to be told, with the exception that on her return to town on that day Edith informed her master that he must look out for a new housekeeper; and although that gentleman was much annoyed at losing a person who suited him so well, still he had to give in to the necessity of the occasion, and a few weeks later was not backward in making the former a substantial present in the form of a cheque for £100 on the occasion of her marriage with John Hartman.

Bill and Paul have no greater delight than to spend their Sundays at Hillside, both agreeing that Jack was always a regular brick, whilst Mrs. Newton's motherly face is ever welcome in the home where the little girl, Grace Hartman, Jack's *protégée*, is the only mystery.

[THE END.]

OUR thoughts are often worse than we are, just as they are often better than we are. And God sees us as we are altogether, not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellow-men see us. We are always doing each other injustice, and thinking better or worse of each other than we deserve, because we only hear and see separate words and actions. We don't see each other's whole nature.

GROWTH OF MANHOOD.—Let us aim at the expansion and growth of a true Christian manhood. The manhood of an understanding open to all truth, and veneration it too deeply to love it except for itself, or barter it for honour, or for gold; of a heart enthralled by no conventionalisms, bound by no frost of custom, but the perennial fountain of all pure humanities; of a will at the mercy of no tyrant without and no passion within; of a conscience erect under all the pressure of circumstances, and ruled by no power inferior to the everlasting law of duty; of affections gentle enough for the humblest sources of earth, lofty enough for the aspirations of the skies. In such manhood, full of devout strength and open love, let every one that owns a soul see that he stands fast; in its spirit, at once humane and heavenly, do the work, accept the good, and wear the burdens of his life.

A FLOWER OF FATE.

—O—

CHAPTER XVII.

At last Moretown Hall was pronounced satisfactory by its most exigent owner. Sir Keith had been absent so long from his home that it required a considerable amount of renovation to make the large building cosy as well as magnificent.

The day for the marriage was drawing nigh, the bells that would ring for the commencement of another year would ring also for the commencement of Keith Moretown's new life.

His handsome, happy face was a sore sight to Rex Darnley, and to one other also—his *fiancée's* brother, Lord Dunmoor.

The latter had spoken out candidly to his cousin.

"On my honour, Rex," he had said, "I feel like some treacherous rogue, whenever I look at Moretown; and yet I have not the courage to speak out and give him just an inkling that Anice is not quite the angel of goodness he imagines. Ah! Rex," the young man had added, with a sigh, "it goes against the grain to speak so of one's sister; I had hoped that this engagement at least was genuine—that her heart had been touched at last; but I find I was mistaken. Instead of acting for good it seems to have made Anice more inconsiderate, worldly, and selfish than she was before, if that is possible."

Rex's answer had been to grasp his cousin's hand.

"You can acquit yourself of any wrong, Dunmoor; you have done all that mortal man could do; and believe me, old fellow, speaking to Moretown, difficult and delicate as it would be, would produce no effect except anger on his part; he is too deeply infatuated to be roused, except by Anice herself, and that unfortunately will come soon."

Rex never found an opportunity to speak to Lady Anice again about the Comtesse de Ganyani; but as he never heard her name mentioned, he concluded that she had spoken to Keith, and that all had been explained to his satisfaction.

He mingled much with the busy preparations for the wedding—it took him out of himself; for, since his parting with Vera, he had suffered an agony of regretful longing and despairing love. He seemed changed to many, even Lady Anice could not fail to observe his quiet mien and almost sad expression.

"Can he be in love?" she asked herself; then a sneer disfigured her pretty mouth. "In love! Bah!—an icicle like Rex!"

It pleased her to arrive at this conclusion, for against herself she was more piqued than she would have cared to confess at his non-appreciation of her dainty beauty and open dislike for herself.

He had seen Tom Watson, who was, as Mr. Mason had prophesied, contrite to a degree, and who had listened to all his advice and promised to abide by it. One thing Rex urged most strongly—he wisdom and just obligation for Watson to inform his mother and sister of his marriage. He felt that this might be of great comfort to Vera, and he promised to speak on the same subject to Mr. Mason and make everything smooth.

He had a more difficult task than he imagined, as Tom's employer, being a straightforward, honest man, was really incensed at his secretary's want of truth. Indeed, but for Rex's intercession, he would have written at once to Tom and asked him to resign his appointment.

"Ah me! I fear for your future, my darling!" Rex thought, as he left the office; "but as long as life is given me, I will guard you as best I can. There is one thing, the man loves you—weak, unprincipled as I am afraid he is, he loves you—how could he do otherwise? There may be weariness of spirit, disappointment, perhaps even disgrace, but there will be no brutality. You are freed from

(that wretch De Mortimer, and that is well, even at the cost of our love!)

Vera traced his influence in her young husband. Though they had been married only a few short weeks, they had been long enough for her to gauge Tom's character to its utmost depths. She felt pity for his terrible instability, his moral weakness; she was touched by his devotion to herself; although, even in that, she recoiled from his grovelling love; that had so little manliness in it; but she could not crush the contempt that would spring in her heart as she learnt how easily he lied, and how prostration seemed no shame, how his nature abhorred work, and how he turned by inclination out of the straight path, being indeed little better than a vane, blown to and fro by the last impression his mind received!

She kept this to herself, and smiled faintly when Amy and Mrs. Watson came to London and launched out into praise of their darling. Amy, it was true, did not say much, but the mother was never tired of dwelling on the subject. Both women welcomed the girl with warmth and tenderness that was refreshing to Vera's heart—grown weary so long for want of it, and in return she gave them glimpses of the sweet, affectionate nature which all the clouds of sorrow could not tarnish.

"I will not say that," she said, "not surprise me, dear," Mrs. Watson said, "as she held Vera's hand and looked at her handsome, weak son did, lifting her faded eyes to the girl's face; 'but now you are a good, a sweet girl, and I grew to love you in that short time, and I delighted my boy has saved you from that wicked man, your father—poor young creature!'"

Vera's answer was a kiss.

Amy, glancing at her pale, lovely face, asked gently,—

"Do you hear anything of him, Vera?"

Vera shuddered.

"The last I heard was from Maggie. It seems that my—that he has gone to America, so she was told, thinking I had gone there. I cannot say whether this is true."

"Never mind," observed Mrs. Watson, "England or America, he can't have you again, Vera; you have someone to protect you, and who could do that so well as our darling?"

To this Vera made no verbal reply; she only smiled, though in her heart she knew what little store she was already setting on that protectorship in aught but its name. She could always use that weapon in the event of her father claiming her.

After that brief scene with Rex, Vera woke to the necessity of taking up some occupation, turning her brain and mind to some channel outside her life. She dared not let herself think of Rex; it was torture to know of his love, and realize it could never be hers, so with an eagerness that was almost feverish she returned to her studies, and determined to give all her spare moments to the hard work that lay before her, as an actress of legitimate and Shakespearian parts.

Mrs. Watson was a little sorry, not to say vexed, at the girl's fixed resolve to continue on the stage.

"As Tom's wife, my dear," she tried to remonstrate feebly, "do you think it wise? Will Mr. Mason like it? You must consider everything well; besides, Vera, I thought you hated the life!"

"I hated it as I lived it when you first met me, it is true," Vera replied, quietly; "but I must work, and there is no other occupation open to me. I shall speak to Mr. Mason before I do anything definitely."

Tom, too, demurred a little, but Vera took no notice of his objection, which, indeed, was shortlived, when Tom began to think of the prospective golden harvest likely to accrue from his wife's theatrical career.

With Amy, Vera was strangely silent, but the girls seemed drawn even closer together by reason of that very silence. No one knew better than Amy the truth about her brother;

and though she loved him she could not shut her eyes to the fact that Vera's future would probably be darkened by sorrow, if not by shame.

After awhile Amy and her mother went back to Bentley, and then Vera's everyday life began. She neglected no wifely duty, but, despite that, she could not crush the contempt that was growing so slowly and surely in her heart for her husband.

When she had read and thought out several parts she went to Mr. Robinson of the Thespia, reminded him of his promise, was received most cordially, and in very short time found herself studying with one of the first elocutionists of the day, while her debut was already an affair of consideration. She also went to Mr. Mason, and in her sweet, frank manner put everything clearly to him, stating her plans quietly and clearly.

Mr. Mason, annoyed and vexed by his secretary's unbusiness-like ways, was disposed at first to be curt and cross, but Vera's beauty and sweetness won its way.

"Well," he said, as they parted, "it will make no difference with your husband. I am sorry you are going to adopt the life, Mrs. Watson. It is a hard one, and not the best one in the world for one so young and lovely as you are; but there—that is your business. I am sure you have some good motive, and that is a thing one does not look for in Tom Watson. Why, bless my soul! with such a wife as you the boy should be as straight as a die."

Vera smiled, and went away. The smile faded as she walked along in the cold wind back to her home. She thought of Rex as she walked. It was not often she permitted herself to do so, but something brought him forcibly to her mind.

"I wonder if I shall ever see him again," was the weary cry of her heart. "Oh! to clasp his hand, to hear his voice! My life is so empty, so hard, so lonely!"

And even as she thought this she met him. He was in a hansom whirling past, and she felt her heart leap with a sudden emotion that almost made her faint. She moved on involuntarily; she saw nothing but a mist before her eyes, and then someone was beside her, and she was standing still, her hand clasped in Rex Darnley's.

"How pale you are!" was his greeting, spoken in the hard, cold fashion which used to jar on her so terribly, but which she knew now came from concentration. "Are you well?"

"Quite quite well," she murmured, drawing her hand from his. "And you?"

Rex shrugged his shoulders.

"I am always well. Come into the Park for one instant; I want to speak to you."

They were close to the Marble Arch, and, making a sign to his cab to wait, Rex turned with the girl into the deserted flowerless Park.

They walked without speaking to a seat. No one was near, the day was not inviting, and winter had shorn the outside world of all its beauty.

Vera sank on to the seat, and Rex sat beside her, occupying himself at first with turning over the loose gravel with his stick.

"Is this true?" he asked at last, pulling his hat over his brow and resolutely looking away from the tremulous, lovely face beside him.

Vera seemed to guess his meaning.

"That I am going back to the stage? Yes," she answered.

"Is it wise?"

She made a gesture with her hands and then said in a low voice,—

"I must."

Rex hit a pebble away violently.

"I fail to see that," he declared in tones that were strangely angry; "your husband should not allow it."

"My husband!" Against herself the contempt would out.

"It is he who should work, not you," Rex

went on with that pertinacity usual to him when he was agitated.

"I am not afraid of work," Vera said dreamily; "I welcome it."

There was silence between them till he broke it.

"Are—are you very unhappy?" he asked. He turned, and their eyes met.

"If I do not work I shall go mad," the girl answered, and she rose as she spoke.

Rex checked himself with an effort. How he longed at that instant to snatch her two small hands and draw her to his breast—a haven of peace and love for ever! But it must not be. Was it not her purity, her goodness, that was more to him than aught else?

"Forgive me for asking such a question," he said, hurriedly. "Perhaps you are right to take up some work, only, for Heaven's sake, Vera, be careful of yourself; remember the life you enter—remember!"

She stopped him with a smile so sad it went to his heart.

"What can happen to me, dear, when I love you?"

He took her hand and carried it to his lips; he could not speak, and they went slowly back to the gate.

"I am afraid I have hindered you," Vera said, trying to get on to other topics. "Were you in a hurry?"

"I was only going to my rooms. I have just come from Daly House in —shire, having been there for my cousin's wedding with Keith Moreton."

Vera looked interested.

"That handsome, nice man who came to the performance? Strange, I seemed to have seen him before, and yet that was impossible!"

Rex turned to her.

"Can you remember nothing of your childhood?"

Vera shook her head.

"I can only remember mother—my dear, sweet, angel mother. Ah! what a life of misery she led!"

Rex was silent. He longed to tell her that a rigid search was being made as to her birth and childhood, but refrained. He would not raise hopes that might be utterly false. Time enough to speak of them when something definite was brought to light. As yet the detectives had no clue to De Mortimer's whereabouts, though America was supposed to be the spot, and as he alone could lift the veil, the progress made was slight.

"We must part here," Rex said, as they approached the gate. "Write to me if you should want any friend's help, and you know I will come."

"I will," Vera said.

She put her hand into his, and at that moment a carriage rolled into the park. Two ladies were seated in it, both dark and handsome, and their eyes were fixed on the two standing together.

A smile and gracious bow from both caused Rex to lift his hat, which he did with an ill grace.

"What a handsome, cruel face!" Vera said almost involuntarily, "and like—"

She stopped, and Rex's heart throbbed.

It was the Countess de Ganyani and her daughter who had passed—the stepmother who had worked so much misery in Keith Moreton's early life. Vera had gazed at her as if some strange instinct or memory returned to her as she gazed. To him her sudden hesitation was another link in the chain of evidence that was needed to give her back to her proper sphere and home.

They said farewell quietly, and he stood watching the slender, graceful figure disappear before he stepped into his cab.

"If it but comes right," he murmured, as he drove on, "I can see her taken from the life of drudgery and hardship, surrounded by luxury and affection. Yet how quiet! how brave! how true she is! 'What could happen to me, dear, when I love you?'—Vera, my

darling! Heaven grant [my love may be the guardian of your existence. Fate may be cruel, but [come what will our love can never die!"]

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE year was growing out of its first youth, when Sir Keith and Lady Anice Moretoun returned from their long honeymoon abroad. London was very full, Parliament had met early, and, despite the cold, uncongenial weather, the streets were filled with smart carriages and pedestrians.

Gaiety was almost at as great a height as in the season, and in the theatrical world no little excitement was caused by the announcement that Mr. Robinson of the Theopha had engaged the Lyric Theatre for the debut of Miss Lorraine, a new actress of whom report spoke highly.

Vera had wisely changed her name. De Mortimer's was not held in the highest esteem, and Watson was impossible, so she chose Lorraine as being pretty and new. She had worked very hard, and found her studies at once a solace and delight; it was very different to the rough, vulgar, degrading life she had led in the operative travelling company. There was poetry, artistic conception twined in with the parts with which she meant to identify herself, and, warmly assisted and praised by her manager and master, she hoped for a success.

The week before her appearance, Tom Watson received an intimation from Mr. Mason that his services would be required no longer. He kept this from Vera, partly from shame, and partly from that cunning that goes with weakness. He knew, and was peevishly annoyed at the fact, that any sympathy and liking Vera might have had for him he had banished long ago; and instead of her industry proving infectious, he hailed it as a probable solution to the problem of how they were to live in the future. Had Vera loved her young husband things might perhaps have been different. But as he felt her gradually rising above him, and shaming him by her steadfast, womanly strength and courage, he devoted himself with sullen perversity to his amusements, which, unfortunately for him, were, for the most part, gambling ones.

Vera had a hard time, rehearsing every day, studying every night, writing letters to Amy and her mother, and waiting hour after hour for Tom to come home and let her go to rest. For, with her customary selfishness, Vera had agreed to sit up for her husband and let the landlady retire to her well earned repose.

There was a feverishness and excitement about Tom that oppressed her, not knowing the cause, and her heart grew faint as a vision of the future came, with its loneliness and misery. Many and many a time the longing came to her to speak openly to her husband—to say that it had been a great, a terrible mistake—to suggest that they should part and live their own lives; but she always crushed it. She had vowed herself to this man, and duty must be done. Besides, she knew that to a certain extent she held some influence over him, and that it was for his good; and, knowing this, she felt she must not leave him, be her life harder and harder each day.

After that chance meeting with Rex, she had become unconsciously comforted. The fact that this strong, true, brave man loved her was a secret joy which even the sorrow of lasting separation could not dim. Her father and his brutality had passed from her mind; she was safe from his degrading influence; and weak and contemptible as Tom Watson was, he was always refined, and a gentleman. The day of her debut came.

Vera would never forget it. She had spent the preceding night in a lonely vigil waiting with anxiety and dread for her husband, who never came home. As dawn was creeping slowly over the sky she flung herself down on the hard couch, and slept a deep, weary,

troubled sleep, till the entrance of the landlady roused her. Her last rehearsal was at eleven, and as the moments passed she knew not what to do, for Tom never came.

She left the house sick with nervousness, and the apprehension that still more sorrow was at hand, though she brought all her natural courage to bear on the situation, and argue the possible reasons for Tom's absence. It was a position sufficient to try the stoutest woman's heart; now much more so when a day of suspense, excitement, and mental work lay before her such as rarely comes in a lifetime. Vera had not a single friend of whom she could ask sympathy on this day. Maggie and her husband were in the country, and would return only just in time to see the performance. Rex Darnley she knew nothing of, and Tom, who should have comforted and assisted her, was only adding to her mental care by his selfishness or carelessness.

Had she received much attention at the theatre, in all probability she would have broken down; but Mr. Robinson was a wise man; he saw the agitation and nervousness on her face, and addressed her throughout the day in the curtest way possible, thereby bracing Vera up to the best of her ability.

A very large and fashionable audience were assembled in the Lyric when the orchestra commenced the overture before the curtain rose, and chief among this was Lady Anice Moretoun, her handsome husband, and a host of smart men fluttering in and out of her box.

Keith Moretoun's face had already lost its radiant youthfulness; it was not unhappy, but the supreme content that had shone in his eyes during his brief betrothal was gone, and a steady thoughtfulness was reflected instead.

"Poor Keith! already changed," murmured Rex Darnley to himself, glancing up from his stall to the box where Lady Anice's jewelled prettiness attracted much attention; "it is only what I feared. Well, if that last clue turns up I may be instrumental in giving him a sister whose sweetness surely must console him for his wife's heartlessness."

Such a thought was natural to Rex, for Vera was to him the sweetest of all women; but to Keith Moretoun the shattering of his love-dream would be a lasting blow, which no sister's hand, however tender, could touch or heal.

"Why, there is Rex! Keith, go and fetch him. I want to speak to him."

And Lady Anice touched her husband imperiously with her jewelled fan. She did not particularly care to see Rex, but she desired the absence of her husband for two or three minutes.

Sir Keith rose at once.

"Rex—where? ah! I see. I am glad, dear old fellow. Prince, will you excuse me?"

The Prince de Boules, a tall, remarkable rather than handsome man, who had entered the box a few minutes before, bowed gracefully.

As Sir Keith disappeared the Prince dropped into a chair close to Lady Anice's dainty white robes.

"At last I have one instant. I was in despair," he murmured, fastening his dark, sad eyes on the piquante face.

"Nonsense!" Lady Anice laughed, a little constrainedly. "Where is the Countess, and what about that ball?"

The Prince shrugged his shoulders.

"The Countess is mad about that ball; she declares it will be the success of the season. You are coming?"

Lady Anice frowned.

"I mean to come."

"And Sir Keith?" queried the other.

"Oh! Keith is a fool. It seems he has a grudge against the Countess—at least he never said so, but he refuses to visit her, and —"

"And wishes you to follow his footsteps, eh?" finished the Prince. "Well, I don't know why you should object, ma belle."

Ma belle frowned.

"I will not be dictated to by anyone," she

declared. "Now go. Come back and talk to me between the acts."

"It will be night till then," was the soft, impassioned whisper, as the Prince obediently withdrew just as Sir Keith and Rex came in.

"Where did you pick up that fellow?" asked the latter, in his usual curtsy way, as he exchanged greetings with his cousin.

"What fellow?" drawled Lady Anice, languidly. "Oh! the Prince de Boules; we met him in Florence; he is rather amusing."

"Is he?—looks like a bandit," Rex said, quietly, taking in the fair, flushed cheek carefully; "a dangerous one too!"

"I confess," Sir Keith laughed, easily, "he has something of that air; but he is not a bad fellow, Rex."

"Hum! I have my doubts on that score," thought Rex.

"Why, there is that horrid Mrs. Motte!" exclaimed Lady Anice, as Maggie and her husband entered their box opposite; "what on earth does he dress her like that for; she looks scarcely decent."

Rex glanced from Mrs. Motte's black satin dress, which permitted a very little of the white shoulders to be seen, to Lady Anice's most décolleté bodice.

"Glossy houses, Anice," he observed, drily. "You know the proverb."

Lady Anice flushed; she always felt at a disadvantage with her cousin, and longed to implant some pain in his heart, or shake his cool, quiet manner.

The curtain rose on the first act of *Romeo and Juliet*. The crowd of Montagues and Capulets surged and squabbled, the love-sick Romeo poured out his passion for Rosaline, and Rex felt an insane hatred and jealousy for the handsome young actor who a few moments hence would be standing side by side with his one true love.

He scarcely followed the text, his heart was throbbing wildly, his ears hungering for the first sound of her voice.

It came at last, those low, sweet, clear tones. "How now! who calls?" and from the curtains came forth a slender, graceful girl, with hair unbound, that fell like a golden mantle to her knees.

There was a momentary hush of surprise at the new Juliet's beauty; then surprise and courtesy melted into a hearty burst of welcome that echoed again.

Rex sat motionless through that scene. He saw nothing but the pure, sweet face, with eyes of deepest, rarest blue. She was his—his very own! Had she not said it?

He turned as the curtain fell for the next scene, and caught Lady Anice's eye. She was mortified beyond words to discover in the new actress the girl Vera she had so much disliked; but with her mortification came the delight that at last she had fathomed Rex's secret. She had half guessed it that night when the news of Vera's disappearance had come; but now she was sure.

"Very amateurish!" she summed up.

But to this neither her husband nor Rex replied. Sir Keith was thinking only of Vera, and wondering in a strange, excited way if Rex's idea could be true, and that this girl could be the lost Madge he had loved—the legacy of that dead angel mother. If it were really so, how much happiness lay before him! He would take her from her life of drudgery—and perhaps poverty—enshrine her in the home she had been born in, and from which she had been so strangely swept away.

The curtain fell on the first act. It shut out the figure of Juliet standing in the moonlit ballroom, gazing after the fast-vanishing Romeo, an agony of dawning love and sorrow in her face, foreshadowing the tragic tale to come.

There was no mistake about the success; the applause rang again and again, and three times Vera was led before the curtain to gratify the audience.

Lady Anice fanned herself leisurely. It was odious to her to hear the adulation poured out on this girl. She hated Vera for her



[AT THE OPERA. A DANGEROUS FRIEND.]

youth, beauty, and talent, but above all because she had touched that strange, cold heart of Rex Darnley, which no wiles of Keith Moretown's pretty wife could effect. Not that Anice would ever have loved her cousin. No; but because it was hurtful to her vanity, and consequently not to be forgiven.

"There is Lord Vivian talking to that creature!" she observed, with an air of disdain.

Rex glanced across to Maggie's box, and there sure enough was his friend.

"When did Eric come back, I wonder?" he murmured, almost involuntarily.

Lady Anice laughed.

"I see you don't know the last scandal. Rex, Lord Vivian, I believe, has been back some time. Of course he is here to-night!"

"Why of course?" Rex asked, coldly.

"Oh! because everybody knows Miss Lorraine, as she calls herself now, is under his protection."

Rex felt the blood rush to his face, and his hand closed; but he was wise. He saw at once this was but an intentional insult to Vera.

"How like a woman, Anice!" he said, in his most provoking way. "Pray be careful. If scandal tells such tales who shall escape?"

He went out, following Sir Keith, who had heard nothing; and immediately the Prince de Boules made his way to Lady Anice's side, marvelling not a little at the evident bad temper of the dainty beauty who deigned to accept his fulsome admiration.

Rex and Sir Keith sauntered round the corridor, and came upon Lord Vivian.

The heartiest welcome followed, and then the Earl, who looked well and very bronzed, explained that Mrs. Motte had sent him on an errand.

"She wishes me to go round to the stage-door, and try to send, if not give, this locket to Miss Lorraine. It was her mother's, and

Mrs. Motte thinks she might probably like to wear it sometime to-night."

"I can lead the way. Will you come too, Keith?" Rex asked, feeling glad to see the Earl once again, and longing to meet Vera, and whisper his word of congratulation. But Sir Keith put out his hand instead.

"Will you let me look at that locket, Vivian?" he said, hurriedly.

The Earl gave him the slender gold chain and ornament.

Without a word Keith Moretown opened a snap, and disclosed a picture, faded and old, yet still clearly discernible.

"Does this belong to Miss Lorraine? Are you quite sure?" he asked, in a voice that was strained with emotion.

"I know it does," Rex answered. "She left it for Mrs. Motte the evening of her flight. Why do you ask, Keith?"

Sir Keith turned; there were tears in his eyes.

"Rex, old fellow, we have found the last clue. This was my mother's locket, and this is her picture."

"Be brave!" whispered Mr. Robinson in Vera's ear as she went towards the bier in the tomb for the last act. "It has been a veritable triumph. Ah! I knew I was right. Your fortune is made, my child."

"Wait!" she murmured, her every nerve thrilling with the strain of the night's work. "All is not over yet."

But Mr. Robinson shook his head. He was not afraid, and his belief was well-founded, for when the curtain rolled slowly down on the two young forms lying dead, a perfect shout arose for Vera that sounded like a hurricane. With limbs that trembled beneath her she faced the mass of people, dimly conscious of the waving handkerchiefs, the cheers, and the praise.

They led her back to the stage, and she sank exhausted into a chair; while from every

corner flocked carpenters and supers to swell the hymn of triumph.

Suddenly, while her brain was reeling, as it were, beneath the excitement, someone came behind her chair.

"Mrs. Watson," said a voice, and a letter was handed to her.

She took it mechanically, and was about to open it when she saw three faces draw near, and foremost among them Rex. She smiled at him faintly, and then tore open the note.

It was curt, and the few words seemed to daze her.

"St. George's Hospital.

"MADAM,—It is our duty to inform you that a man, giving the name of Tom Watson, and the address of 7, Culworth-terrace, died here this morning. We shall be glad to receive any communication.—We are, Madam,

"V. V."

Rex saw her face grow ghastly pale. Without a second thought he was beside her.

"Vera, good heavens! what is it?"

"Read," she said, hoarsely; and then her strength failed. She swayed forward, and fell senseless in his arms, ignorant for a time that the barrier was removed from her love, that a brother knelt distractedly beside her, that happiness might dawn again!

(To be continued.)

PREFERENCES.—All preferences impose an obligation to give more weight to the opposite side. As men know they will be influenced by their wishes, they should insist in dwelling longer and more carefully on the arguments that thwart them. They should practice a wholesome self-abnegation as far as possible, resisting the force that agrees with their wishes and welcoming that which opposes them, thus doing all in their power to restore the balance which an intense desire has destroyed.



[STRANGELY MET—A MEMORY OF THE PAST.]

NOVELETTE.]

A COUNTRY INNOCENT.

—o:—

CHAPTER I.

"I AM very sorry mamma has invited Agnes here; and I am sure, from the description you give of her, I shall not like her," says Médé Chauncey, rocking herself to and fro, and looking into her sister's proud, clear-cut face anxiously.

Miss Chauncey lifts her great grey eyes from her book.

"Of course," she answers, "I saw Agnes for so short a time that I could hardly form a just estimate of her character; and, after all, she is our own cousin."

"Yes," ruefully, "I wish she were not! I never can understand why Uncle George married Aunt Anna. She is such an artful, scandalising old wretch, and, you know, there is an old saying 'like mother, like daughter,' and I've a fancy Agnes will be terribly like her mother."

"She is in appearance. Well, Médé, we must make the best of a bad bargain! And aunt was so anxious 'her dear child should have the benefit of her town cousins' society' that mamma could scarcely do less than invite her here."

"I've often heard odious comparisons made between the town and country mouse, and the latter is always extolled for her virtues. For my part, I don't believe in country innocence—ignorance, if you like—but for low craft and cunning recommend me to a country girl."

"My dear Médé, that is rather a sweeping assertion," says Miss Chauncey, rising, and yawning extensively, "and not characterised by your usual charity."

"Oh! bother charity!" laughing. "I doubt if such a thing exists now. Where are you going?"

"To dress; Dalzel will be here in less than

half-an-hour, and he doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"Good girl, to remember her lord and master's whims. I expect you won't be such a model of duty after a few years of married life. At present you are in the state of the lady whose mother advises her to 'Never stand prating, keeping him waiting,' and to 'Never look sulky, obstinate, glum. Wait till you're married, my dear!'"

Mathilde Chauncey smiles, but the great grey eyes soften, and the proud lips take a tenderer curve, and Médé says,—

"When you look like you do now I am not surprised that Dalzel thinks you lovely, let who will say to the contrary."

"Thank you; a compliment from one's sister is indeed a compliment!"

And then Mathilde goes up to her room to prepare for her ride, whilst Médé continues rocking herself to and fro, and singing softly, in a clear, sweet soprano,—

"He longed to say he would die for her,
But how and where he could not tell;
So he helped to carry her milking pail,
And that did just as well."

The door opens, and a young man looks in.

"Good morning, Médé; you are merry!"

The girl turns her pretty brown head, and, with lazily, mischievous eyes, surveys the new comer.

"You may come in if you're good, Dalzel, but pray keep on the opposite side of the room, or you'll be exciting Mathilde's jealousy."

Dalzel Holbert laughs.

"I guess Mathilde's too sure of my regard to experience the least tinge of jealousy," he says, beginning to ruffle the short curls about the girl's brow. "What are you going to do with yourself this morning? Won't you join us?"

"No, thank you; playing gooseberry isn't much in my line; besides which, this is my last free morning for a month, and I mean to

enjoy it in my own fashion. You know Agnes arrives to-night, and just in time for the Hatton's ball. Isn't it a beastly nuisance?"

"You are getting awfully slangy," he answers, with mock reproach.

"Girls always do when they've brothers, and prospective brothers-in-law."

"I would punish you if I could only devise punishment severe enough for such impudence as yours. But you haven't told me what sort of girl Agnes is."

"From all I can gather she is short and 'podgy,' has a decent skin, small hands, big eyes, and big feet. But you will see her to-night, and judge for yourself whether she is pretty or not."

"I should say she is from your description," drily. "I say, Médé, Dick Hatton tells me that Fred Hope is home, and will put in an appearance at the ball solely because you will be there."

"I feel immensely flattered!" trying her best to keep down the rising blushes, and failing signally. She sees an amused look gathering in Dalzel's eyes, and the suspicion of a smile playing about his mouth, and says, with an assumption of dignity, "I don't know why you look so amused—And—and here's Mathilde."

The young man turns hastily to meet his betrothed, who is looking more than well in her dark green, perfectly-fitting habit, and, after a little desultory chat they go out together, leaving Médé to her own reflections. She spends a very quiet time with her books and piano, and is surprised to find it so late when her sister returns.

After luncheon they adjourn to Mathilde's room to inspect the heap of finery spread out for this evening's wear, and Médé speculates much as to what manner of gown Agnes will appear in; and whilst they are thus engaged Miss Westley arrives, and, having been welcomed by her aunt, is carried away to her own room, where she is still followed by her

cousins. As Médé enters this is what she sees; a girl of her own age (nineteen), below the medium height, plump, but not of a good figure; she has a brilliant complexion, large dark eyes, shaded by black lashes (and, as Médé mentally concludes, capable of a great deal of execution), a mass of dark hair, and dazlingly white hands, most beautifully formed.

"But, she doesn't know how to dress!" she afterwards says to Mathilde.

Agnes greets the latter effusively, although they have met but once before, then she turns with a smile to Médé.

"I should have known you anywhere, from the description mamma gave of you. Since her return home she has done nothing but sing your praises, and has wished so much we should know each other well."

"I am obliged to Aunt Anna for her good opinion. When you have changed your dress come into Mathilde's room, and let us get better acquainted, Agnes."

"Oh, don't call me Agnes; at home I am always 'Baby'; of course it's stupid, but—"

"I should say it is," Médé answers, more bluntly than she is aware. "You are nineteen, and look it."

"Do you think so? I am generally not taken for more than sixteen. You see in the country we lead such quiet lives, and keep such early hours, that we retain our youth longer than town girls."

"Possibly. I am not prepared to deny it. Ah! here comes tea. Well, you can find the way to Mathilde's room. Come as soon as you please, and I'll make you acquainted with the names of the people you'll meet to-night."

"Oh, I wish I were not going. I have such a nervous horror of meeting strangers. I would far rather stay at home."

"Pray do so, if you would prefer it," says Médé, who hates "any kind of humbug." "I will speak to mamma about it."

"Oh, no, no!" quickly; "pray don't. I should be so grieved to vex aunt, so soon after my arrival, too. I would rather undergo any amount of confusion."

"As you please," with barely suppressed disdain, and turns to leave the room; when Mathilde speaks almost for the first time,—

"I don't know what dresses you have brought with you, but we should be sorry to spoil the effect of yours by our own, so I may as well tell you what we shall wear to-night. My dress is pink and cream, and Médé's is opal. If you require any assistance with your toilet do not scruple to ask me for it," and she fails to impart any warmth to her clear, low tones.

Agnes thanks her with a great show of cordiality, and the sisters leave her to unpacking.

"I hate her," says the younger, vehemently. "I can scarcely be civil to her."

"She is our guest, and as such is entitled to courtesy and consideration; but I confess I share your prejudice."

"And we shall have to endure her society a whole month. It will be a perfect martyrdom," and sinking in a low chair Médé groans dismally, whilst Mathilde watches her amusedly.

Presently there is a light tap at the door, and to Miss Chauncey's "come in" Agnes enters, some draperies hung over her arm.

"I hope I'm not intruding," she says, with a smile that displays her fine teeth to advantage. "I felt I should so like your united opinions as to which dress I should wear to-night. My choice lies between this black with scarlet ribbons, and this yellow gauze."

"Oh! wear the yellow, by all means!" breaks in Médé; the other is such a glaring combination of colours, quite Mephistophelian.

"The yellow is very pretty indeed, and I should say most becoming to you."

"Then I shall most decidedly appear in it, thanks for your candidly and kindly given advice;" and Médé looks up quickly, as though she thinks to detect some latent satire in her

cousin's expression; but the face that meets hers is innocent of guile, and her eyes are smiling, so that the girl feels some compunction for her past acerbity, and says,—

"You'll want some flowers for your hair and bosom. Till, go and coax Marshall to cut me some crimson and yellow roses, and if you want your hair arranged Mathilde is great at that sort of thing, and has learnt a new plait."

"Oh, you are very good; but I won't encroach upon Mathilde's kindness, although I shall be thankful for the flowers."

Evening comes, and the sisters dress in Miss Chauncey's room, chatting gaily the whole while, and well pleased with the result of their labours.

Mathilde has probably never looked fairer than now, in her trailing robes of palest pink and cream, with pearls about her white white throat, and in her waving hair—a gorgeous woman, and a high-bred one, with refinement stamped upon every feature, and the clearest, steady light of truth shining in her gray eyes. Médé forms a striking contrast to her, with her piquante face, and glorious brown eyes that one man has found so haunting.

They go downstairs together to find Mrs. Chauncey, her eldest son Robert, and Dalzel Holbert waiting them.

Médé looks round for Agnes, but she is not visible, and noticing her look Robert says,—

"Have you seen our country cousin? Oh, lord! isn't she gorgeous! Look to your laurels, girls!"

"How did you contrive to catch a glimpse of her? She isn't down yet."

"Oh, she looked out of her door just as I was passing, and seeing me shot back like a startled fawn."

"She doubtless heard your step, and thought to fascinate you, and fix your young affections by granting you a fleeting glance of her beauty."

"For shame, Médé," says Mrs. Chauncey. "I believe you positively hate Agnes, and I'm sure she seems a nice, inoffensive little thing; so shy, too."

"Oh! especially the latter," retorts the girl, sarcastically; then hearing the *frou-frou* of Agnes Westley's skirts outside separates herself from the others, and glances anxiously towards the door.

Agnes enters with a coy air, casting deprecatory looks at those assembled from under her thick fringe. Her dress suits her admirably, and in a certain way she is pretty, but scarcely the sort of woman a man desires for his wife. She has unbound her hair, and it floats round her in big waves, but the innocent style is altogether at variance with her womanly figure.

Médé smiles contemptuously as she notices the coy, upward glance Agnes bestows upon Dalzel as he is introduced to her, and the sudden lowering of the heavy, white lids.

"An unscrupulous coquette!" she whispers to Bob, and he answers, "By Jove! yes; and why can't she wear her hair like other girls?" then with a bow and a smile he crosses to her and offers his arm.

"Oh!" she says, as he leads her to the carriage, "I hope you are coming with us?"

"I regret to say I am not. Holbert and I are to walk, but I'll join you in the ball-room."

"And you will stay by me as much as possible? I am so painfully shy. You see I go out so little, and I wish you would call me Baby; it has such a homelike sound."

Bob thinks both her requests extremely foolish, but promises to do as she wishes, saying to himself, "Poor little beggar! She is homesick already, and the girls don't seem to 'dotton' to her nicely; it's neither kind nor well-bred of them to treat her so coolly."

In the ball-room he joins his cousin according to agreement, and is somewhat surprised to find her chatting to two or three men, apparently easily enough. He would be still further surprised could he hear their comments upon her.

"That little Westley girl is rare fun; a thorough-paced flirt; knows how to use her eyes. Should say her manners hardly go down with the Chauncey girls."

The men make way for him beside her, and presently saunter away. "Baby" looks up at him in a shyly, pleased manner.

"How kind of you to remember poor little me. I was getting horribly uncomfortable."

"You didn't look so," he answers, bluntly.

"Did I not? Oh! I am so glad. I don't want to shame you by any display of *gancherie*. But my heart bent so fast and loud, I thought they would hear it."

Then she holds out her tiny smudged tablets to him.

"Won't you have a dance or two with me? See, I am already engaged for several, and I thought amongst so many pretty women I should go unnoticed. Perhaps people are kind to me because of my relation to you."

He makes some gallant answer, and sits chatting with her until a young guardman claims her for a waltz. He goes in search of his partner, and is seen whirling round the room to the intoxicating strains of the "Dream Fanny Weller." Once Médé passes him by, and leaning near she whispers, softly,—

"Look at the country innocent!"

He does look, and acknowledges to himself that if she is not flirting she is indulging in a remarkably good imitation of that pastime, but he says, exclaiming,—

"She is unused to gaiety, and is fairly thrown off her balance."

All through the long night his eyes turn towards the figure in yellow gauze, and he thinks how charming is her face with that bright flush upon it; how beautifully white the well-turned throat; how bewitching those deep, dark eyes, and gradually becomes reconciled to the manner in which she has dressed her hair. He sees her once dancing with Dalzel; afterwards he asks him his opinion of the country cousin.

"A shy little thing," answers Dalzel, "but I should say a pleasant companion when she is familiar with one."

Shy! Well, that is hardly Rob's impression; but, then, he has paid her much more attention than Dalzel, who, lover-like, has eyes only for Mathilde.

At last dawn begins to break, and the carriages to roll up to Mrs. Hatton's doors. Dalzel and Bob escort their party through the crowd of departing guests.

"This has been a pleasant ball," says Baby, with a soft glance at her cousin. "I shall write mamma to-morrow how greatly I enjoyed myself, and how kind you all have been."

He stoops down and draws her fleecy wrap closer about her throat, thinking how fair she is, with the faint light of dawn falling upon her drooped face. Then he places her beside Médé, and stands watching the carriage until it is out of sight.

Arriving home, the girls, thoroughly wearied, run to their rooms; but Baby begs to be allowed to share Médé's bed.

"Just this once! I am nervous in a strange house," and the latter, although very unwilling, can scarcely refuse permission.

So Baby sinks into a chair, and whilst removing her gloves says,—

"I think Mathilde is very generally admired. Do folks call her lovely?"

"I never heard of them doing so; but I know she is spoken of as the 'fascinating Miss Chauncey,' that exquisite Miss Chauncey," &c. There is a nameless charm about her that must strike even a casual acquaintance.

"Yes," assents Baby, with secret unwillingness; "but, for my own part, I consider you the nicest, both as to looks and manners."

"That is very broad flattery," undisguisedly yawning. "Now, Agnes, you must not think me impertinent, but I am going to speak very plainly. If you wish to please mamma (as you profess to do) you must not flirt so undis-

guisedly as you did to-night. It isn't good form, and it don't obtain in our set."

"I flirt!" says Baby, in an injured tone. "I'm sure nothing was further from my wishes, and I am sorry you should be ashamed of my contrived ways. If I do show my pleasure openly am I to be blamed for my candour?"

Médé yawns once more.

"Oh, if you like to put it that way I've no more to say, only to suggest that you come to bed, and get a little sleep."

"Oh, I am hopelessly wide awake. Médé, is Dalzel Holbert very rich?"

"I believe Mr. Holbert to be fairly well to do," carelessly. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I heard Mrs. Hatton say what a good match Mathilde would make; and she said one day, when his uncle died, he would be Lord Holbert. Is that true?"

"Quite."

"Then Mathilde will be 'my lady'?"

"Of course she will. Good-night, or rather good-morning!" and turning her face to the wall she is soon asleep.

But Baby lies awake a long, long time, musing over many things. Yet she rises with Médé, fresh and bright, and after breakfast hurries to her room to indite a letter "to mamma."

Could one look over her shoulder as she writes, these are some of the words one would read.

CHAPTER II.

"DEAR MA—

"You will see by this that I arrived quite safely at Montrose Villa. I was welcomed very cordially by aunt and uncle; but Mathilde and Médé were the reverse of friendly. The former is more concisely than ever since her engagement to Dalzel Holbert. Of course, he is a very good catch—rich, nice-looking, and heir to a title; and what he finds in Mathilde to admire I can't imagine. She is a proud, pale, uninteresting piece of femininity, whilst Médé is as insignificant as a maid-of-all-work, although she fancies she is pretty."

"Now about Dalzel Holbert. Of course I know it is necessary I should marry well, and soon—pa and you haven't preached to me in vain about that—and I mean to enter the lists against 'my lady' Mathilde, and if I lend first favourite I shall expect no small amount of praise for my achievement, as at present he seems devoted to her. Bob is quite willing to be my beau, to fetch and carry for me; but I have no idea of supporting life on a small income. I've already known too much of genteel poverty."

Then follows a great deal more, all precisely to the same effect; and having drawn her letter to a close, Miss Westley seals and addresses it, then goes down and out upon the lawn sloping to the river, for Montrose Villa is on the banks of the Thames.

Bob, Dalzel, and Mathilde are lazily disporting themselves on the grass. Médé lies in a boat, her hands clasped beneath her head. She greets her cousin coolly, adding—

"Don't that mass of hair make you awfully hot?" and looks with disfavour upon the untidy brown tresses.

"Not in the least," says Baby, "and I prefer it loose. You see it is so short a time since I was promoted to long frocks and plaits that I am hardly yet accustomed to either."

"What a refreshing little piece of innocence you are!" retorts Médé, languidly. "Upon my word it does one good to find so much simplicity still in existence."

Baby glances suspiciously at the girl, but says nothing, only she turns with a smile to Bob, who asks what she has been doing all the long morning.

"Writing to ma; I could not neglect sending her a line. You see I have never been from home before, and she must miss me awfully. Oh! how lovely the river looks!"

"Would you like a row?"

"Oh, yes, above all things—that is, if you will not find the day too hot for such exercise."

"I shall be happy to afford you any pleasure," and he assists her into her seat, whilst Médé moves to the bow, and mounts guard there.

Between herself and Baby there is already war to the knife, and each recognises and tacitly accepts this fact, only Miss Westley is wise in her generation, and seeks, by every means in her power, to conciliate Médé.

Bob does not find the row as pleasant as he had hoped, for his sister is in her most sarcastic mood, and pounces down upon any little piece of sentimental folly on his part or Baby's with what he calls diabolical zest. And so it is through all the days that follow. Médé is Baby's shadow, and as the young man is becoming speedily enamoured of his country cousin, he longs for opportunities of private speech, but can get none, being always thwarted by Médé.

Towards Dalzel Miss Westley adopts a peculiar air of sympathy and commiseration which he is at a loss to understand; and her covert, deprecatory glances give him an uncomfortable sensation which he cannot shake off in her presence.

So three weeks wear by, and it is very evident to all that Bob means shortly to put his fate to the test. Mrs. Chauncey is pleased, but with Mr. Chauncey his son's infatuation is a sore matter. He remembers Baby's mother is an ill-bred, extravagant, evilly-disposed woman; whilst her father is a prodigal, the associate of gamblers and betting men, and that in all his life he has done nothing to command respect or love.

Médé herself reasons with her brother.

"Bob," she says gravely, "I think it would be wise to leave home for a few weeks."

"Why?" he asks sharply.

"Because you are in danger of making a fool of yourself."

"In what way?" growing very red, and plucking viciously at the grass on which he lies.

"You know as well as I. Why do you force me to be so explicit? You are getting just a little too fond of Agnes Westley's society, and if for a moment you imagine she is doing more than amusing herself with you, or that she will ever be so false to herself as to marry you, you are deceiving yourself, and helping to spoil your own life."

"Now, look here, Médé; I'm going to be as plain with you as you have been with me. You are jealous of Baby's prettiness and innocent way; you have been so from the first, and have done your best to prejudice us all against her. This is not generous or womanly, and quite unlike the idea I had formed of your character. Understand, that from to-day I will listen to no word against her, will resent all insults offered her as injuries to myself, and if she will only consent to my pleading, I will make her my wife at the very earliest date possible."

The slow crimson mounts into Médé's cheeks and mantles her brows; a swift and bitter retort is upon her lips, but she suppresses it, and, with a shrug of the shoulders, says merely—

"As you will; you have a perfect right to please yourself," and moves lazily from him amongst the flowers. But in her heart she says, "If I have any power to help you, you shall never rush headlong into ruin. I must measure my cunning against hers—must fight her with her own weapons; and if, in the end, I save you from yourself, I wonder will you thank me?"

Whilst she loiters in the garden, and Mathilde is helping her mother to receive the morning visitors, Baby stands with Dalzel in the breakfast-room. In a way peculiarly her own, she has lured him on to speak of his hopes, his present position, his future prospects, and when he comes to a sudden pause, then goes on again hurriedly,—

"You must think me awfully egotistical," she answers with her commiserating look.

"Oh! no, no! I like hearing those things."

"How fortunate you are! How happy you should be!"

"I am happy," he answers honestly. "Why do you emphasise the *should*?"

"Because sometimes I have feared you were not. (Sometimes, when you are with Mathilde, you look dissatisfied and miserable.)"

"Then I ought to be ashamed of myself," he says, with a hearty laugh.

"I have occasionally doubted if she really understands you, and loves you as perfectly as you can desire. Oh! forgive me, if I seem curious or obtrusive."

"You are neither, Miss Westley; but as regards myself and Mathilde, I doubt if any two persons could understand each other better than we do, or agree so well."

"That is strange," musingly. "You are so frank, she so cold and constrained. Of course I admire her, as everybody must do; but I stand a little in awe of her, she is so different to most girls."

"True. She has no 'gush,'" he replies, proudly and fondly; "she is true as steel, and I think it may be said of her, she would suffer death sooner than dishonour."

"Is that a rare thing in a woman?" with lowered lashes, and a bright blush upon her face.

She has a way of blushing with or without cause, and this habit has impressed Bob with a perfect belief in her shyness and innocence.

"I hope not," gravely; and then he turns from her to greet Mathilde, who enters at this moment.

A pang of envy fills Baby's heart as she sees his look, and notes how beautiful her cousin appears. She is wearing a dress of some soft white material, embroidered with gold; the masses of her nut-brown hair, drawn loosely from the broad white brow, are coiled low upon the whiter neck; and in the clear grey eyes the steady light of love is shining. Cold!—Dalzel smiles as he recalls the word—cold! with that soft flush upon her cheek, that tender smile about her mouth!

"Dalzel," and her voice is sweetest music to him,—"*Dalzel*, I am so sorry to have kept you waiting, but Lady Colvin was in her proudest mood, and I could not effect my escape sooner. Now, what shall we do this morning? It is too bright and warm to waste. Shall we ride, row, or walk?"

"Walk," he answers, promptly. "The country is simply lovely, and town can spare us for one morning. Of course you will join us, Miss Westley?" turning to Agnes.

"May I?" with a deprecatory look at Mathilde. "I should so like it if Médé is going too."

Half-an-hour later Bob and Baby declare they are quite ready to start, and the latter adds that Médé declines to accompany them on the plea of a bad headache. They are a merry party, and Mathilde has as much pleasure in searching for wild flowers as the veriest child; and when at last Dalzel declares it is time to turn homewards she evinces great unwillingness to do so.

Bob and Baby take the opposite direction, so that the lovers are alone. They talk of many things, Dalzel skilfully leading up to the subject of their marriage, and Mathilde answers in low tones of tremulous happiness.

As they draw near a little hillock they see a man seated upon it, his head bowed in his hands, and his whole attitude so expressive of dejection that Dalzel says,—

"Poor beggar! he looks as though things have not gone too smoothly with him."

Hearing their steps the man glances up, and Dalzel sees a refined, handsome face, of an Italian type, with great dark eyes, whose chief expression is that of settled melancholy. Turning to speak to Mathilde, he is surprised to find her white and trembling.

"I have walked too far," she says, hurriedly; "let us get home as quickly as possible."

The Italian regards her intently, so intently that Dalzel is annoyed, and drawing her hand in his arm hurries her on. He hears her breath coming hard and fast, and he sees a piteous, strange look in the eyes that, for the first time in all his knowledge of them, will not meet his own, and a cruel suspicion fills his mind.

"Mathilde," he says, harshly, "what has that fellow to do with your agitation and sudden faintness?"

"Nothing whatever," she answers, quietly, but does not glance at him. "Why should he? I am only very tired; we have walked an unusual distance."

But he is not convinced, and Baby's words and looks return to him, although in his loyalty he strives to forget them, and keep his faith in Mathilde whole and entire. He says no more now of his doubts, and perhaps he would easily have forgotten them, but for the marked change in his fiancée's manner.

As the days pass by he notices a certain restraint in her words and ways, a certain restlessness wholly foreign to her proud, calm nature, and meeting Baby's commiserating eyes, will grow sick at heart with vague pain and undefinable doubt. It seems to him that Mathilde avoids any *tête-à-tête* with him, that she is best pleased when they are surrounded by her family and friends; and as her constraint, her restlessness, become more palpable he grows colder, more watchful, more ready to distrust her—to disbelieve in the love she has always so passionately protested.

One day he finds himself alone with Baby, and she, rising, lays a timid hand upon his arm, and standing before him with heavy, down-dropped lids, says,—

"Oh! Mr. Holbert, will you believe that there is one who grieves for your grief—who sees all your misery, and would alleviate it if she could—whose heart protests against the unmerited coldness you endure—"

As she ceases, apparently in fear that she has said too much, he gently removes her hand, and says in a voice that is harsh, despite his utmost endeavours to make it otherwise,—

"You are labouring under some strange delusion, Miss Westley. You imagine that I am in trouble when my life is probably at its brightest."

"Oh!" she answers, in a low tone, "do not think to deceive me. I have seen all your struggles to hide your pain. I have tried to blind myself to the change in Mathilde, but failed—"

Loyal to the woman he loves, he says,—

"It is but a temporary cloud between us that will leave our sky the brighter when it passes."

Baby sighs heavily.

"I hope it may be so—oh! I hope with all my heart it may be so."

"Why are you so ready to doubt her?" he demands, angrily.

"Heaven knows I do not distrust her willingly. But I see so much that is strange in her conduct that my fears for your happiness daily increase."

"What is my happiness to you?"

"Can you ask me that? I had hoped and believed you regarded me as your friend. If I am so unfortunate as to be mistaken I beg your pardon for my presumption. But you have been so invariably kind to me, so uniformly considerate for me, that I had sufficient ground for my hope."

"I have spoken to you so harshly that I am afraid you will never forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive," with a half-veiled glance of tenderness; "and between friends there should be no question of forgiveness."

"You are a kind little soul!" he says, sighing, and in his heart he wishes that Mathilde had more of this girl's wooing way, more gentleness of manner—in fact, that she were more demonstrative, forgetting for awhile that "still waters run deep."

Later on Médé finds him in the conservatory,

looking so moody, so ill at ease, that she laughingly asks,—

"What crime have you on your conscience, Dalzel? Your gloom leads me to believe it is nothing short of murder."

He says, gravely,—

"I am glad to have a chance of quiet speech with you, Médé, because I think you may enlighten me on one or two things which concern me nearly."

"What a terrific preface! But please to believe you have my keenest attention."

He broaches the subject with unnatural bluntness.

"What is the cause of the change I see—and you must see too—in Mathilde?"

She does not give him an evasive answer, or seek to mislead him. Her reply is steady, and to the point.

"I cannot tell you; I wish I could. I have questioned her closely, but all to no purpose."

"She has had a very gay season—has it been too much so for her health and strength?"

"I cannot say, it may be so; and yet, apparently, she ails nothing."

"Do you believe"—and now his voice grows hoarse and strained—"do you believe she is quite happy in her engagement?"

"I know that she is; is not her love for you most apparent?"

"She has not evinced much pleasure lately when in my society; Médé, Heaven is my witness that I love her with all my heart—with all my life; but if she has grown indifferent to me, if some other man has won from her what should be mine, and what, until now, I have believed to be mine, I will give her her freedom at once, and without a word of reproach. I have seen too much of the misery of loveless marriages to contemplate such an union for myself."

"You are giving yourself unnecessary pain, Dalzel," Médé says earnestly; "I am perfectly certain that Mathilde's love for you is unchanged, and unchangeable."

He sighs wearily, but apparently accepts her words as true, for he says no more on the subject; but Baby's insinuations will recur to him again and again, and coupling them with the alteration in Mathilde, his doubts and fears increase. He almost hates Baby in these days, for, when he speaks or moves, he is conscious that her eyes follow him with covert commiseration, and pity is not pleasant to one of his nature.

One evening he misses Mathilde from the drawing-room and asks Médé where she is; the girl replies in all good faith that she is lying down with a severe headache. Glancing towards Baby, he sees such an expression of incredulity upon her face that he is startled. But he will not stoop to question her, and strives not to show his anxiety; and when, an hour later, Mathilde enters looking pale and weary, but protesting she is better, he is fain to believe that Médé had spoken the truth. But in the long hours of the night his heart misgives him, and groaning, he hides his face in his hands.

"If she is false, who then is true? Oh! Mathilde, Mathilde, my darling heart!"

Morning breaks at last. A fine morning, bright with sunshine, heavy with the scent of myriads of flowers, jubilant with the songs of the birds, and that strong, sweet sense of life, felt only on a summer morn.

Dalzel rises unrefreshed, heavy of heart, and prepares to go through the day, to play his part, and fulfil the engagements peculiar to his station. There is a feeling akin to dread upon him of what the day may bring forth, and, strive as he will, he cannot thrust it aside, or rise above it. He has told Mathilde he shall not see her until the following morning, and yet he has a strong desire to be near her,—to forego all his engagements and hasten to her. It seems to him that danger threatens them both, and through all the long hours this thought grows and grows until it becomes conviction. This evening he has promised to dine with some bachelor friends, but at the

last moment he finds an excuse, and throwing a dust-coat over his conventional attire, goes towards Montrose Villa.

Entering the grounds, he is surprised to find Baby standing behind the laurel hedge dividing them from the road.

"What are you doing here alone?" he asks.

She seems confused, and shrinks back from him.

"Don't ask me!" she cries, agitatedly, "don't ask me! Oh! Mr. Holbert, what shall I say to comfort you?"

"What do you mean?" he questions, hoarsely; "what need have I of comfort?"

She feigns unwillingness to tell him, wrings her hands in all apparent distress; but when he pleads, persuades, commands, she covers her face, and says with a sob,—

"Oh! Mr. Holbert, how you have been deceived! The woman you love is false to you! Last night, and to-night, she has stolen out to meet a more favoured admirer than you. I was waiting for her to come back, to assist her to enter unseen. Oh! Mr. Holbert, what shall I say to you? how shall I console you under the knowledge that Mathilde is false?"

"It is a lie!" he cries, fiercely, so fiercely that Baby shrinks back from him; but she says, brokenly,—

"You do not know what you are laying to my charge. Wait here until she returns; wait here and see if I have lied to you. What interest should I have in blackening my cousin's name to you? She has been good to me, and I am grateful. Oh, Mr. Holbert! although you see what I have seen, and hear (as I have heard) her words of love to this other man—your rival—be merciful to her! After all, this may be but a foolish summer flirtation, which you will find easy to forgive."

"If," he says hoarsely,—"if she has so forgotten what is due to herself and to me as to meet any lover clandestinely, and at such an hour as this, she is no fit woman to fill the place my mother once occupied in my home. My wife's name must be free from the lightest breath of scandal or reproach."

"You are very, very hard," Baby murmurs, keeping her face still hidden in the masses of her hair. "Oh! let me plead with you for her."

"You good little soul!" he answers, touched by her seeming generosity and grief—"you good little soul! If I could grant your petition I would, but I cannot afford to trample on my self-esteem."

"Listen!" the girl whispers, "there are steps upon the road. Oh! promise you will do nothing rash, that you will not accost them while they are together—Oh! I wish I had told you nothing, I am so terribly afraid!" And she clings to his arm.

Nearer the footsteps come, and looking out he sees two figures. His heart throbs madly; a wild rush of rage and despised love holds him silent and motionless a moment.

The level white beams of the moon fall full upon the two faces—and one is Mathilde's, the other, that of the Italian who sat by the roadside!

He strives to speak, he strives to rush out upon them; but his agony holds him silent, and Baby clings to him so tenaciously that he cannot stir.

CHAPTER III.

MATHILDE'S face is turned towards him, and the light summer breeze wafts her voice and her words to him.

"If possible I will see you to-morrow, but I cannot promise; each time we meet I am in danger of discovery. You know what that would mean for me, Manuel?"

"Yes; and I cannot thank you sufficiently for risking so much for me," her companion answers in a refined, musical voice, and with the slightest possible accent. "I will come down to-morrow in the mere hope of seeing you."

"Do; I shall be glad to hear more of—"

and here her tone is so low that Dalzel cannot hear her words.

Then she offers him her hand, and once more the wretched watcher essays to join them and upbraid her with her heartless treachery. But again Baby stays him.

"Would you shame her before him?"

And even in the midst of his anguish and rage that thought has weight with him.

"Good-bye, Manuel; hasten home, it is growing late. Once more, good-night."

"Good-night, my dear," and stooping he kisses her cheek.

A groan breaks from Dalzel, and involuntarily his hands are clenched. Like one in a dream he sees the man's slender figure disappearing amongst the trees; sees, too, how Mathilde stands watching by the gate until he is lost to sight.

Then he hears the faint click of the latch as she enters and looks round anxiously. He shakes off Baby's detaining hand, and steps forward to meet her. As he advances she utters a little cry, then says, trembling,—

"Dalzel, I did not expect to see you to-night."

Then the expression of his face tells her he has witnessed that parting at the gate; and with a moan she puts out her hands as if to ward off his anger.

"Mathilde," he says, and his voice is husky and laboured, "what is the meaning of this night's excursion?"

He is striving to be calm, madly endeavouring to believe she can clear herself to him; vainly labouring to keep some remnant of faith in her because of his great love.

She stands silent before him a moment, and he repeats his question; then she says, faintly,—

"Do not ask me anything now, Dalzel. I can tell you nothing; but, oh! believe I am not false to you, that I never have been false in word or deed!"

He laughs out harshly.

"How can I believe you in face of what I recently saw and heard? How can I have faith in your word, when I remember how you vowed this man was a stranger to you?"

Her weary eyes fall upon Baby.

"You!" she says, sharply, "you here! Why should our affairs concern you? Leave us," and again, imperatively, as Baby hesitates, "Leave us! What I have to say is for no ears but Mr. Holbert's."

Then they are alone, with the silvery moonlight falling around them, showing the white anguish on either face, the despair and rage in his eyes, the agony of love in hers.

"Mathilde," he pleads, hoarsely, "tell me what this means? Give me some reason for your conduct. I am so willing to listen, so willing to excuse, if any excuse can be made for you. In what have I failed that you should reward my love and loyalty with indifference and treachery?"

"You have failed in nothing," she answers, wearily; "neither has my heart turned from you. As I loved you in the earlier days I love you now!"

"Silence!" he mutters. "Do not lie so wilfully, so vainly! Can I forget your glances, your words? Can I forget how you have stolen out to meet this man—this man who looks love into your eyes, who is privileged to kiss you, to call you by endearing names?"

She clasps her hands about his arm, and lifts her white face to his. It is so full of entreaty, so woe-begone, so utterly despairing that a faint thrill of pity stirs his heart one moment, only to leave it harder and sterner the next.

"Dalzel, I will swear, if you wish it, by all my hopes of happiness, by the memory of all the glad days we have spent together, that this man is nothing to me; that, indeed, he is pledged to another. Oh! my darling, my darling, do not thrust me away, do not fail me in the first hour of this trial! I have done nothing to shame you, nothing to reflect discredit upon myself. Some day I will tell

you all, and you will freely absolve me of all blame."

"If you have any explanation to offer it must be given now."

"I cannot—I dare not speak yet! Oh! my beloved, show me some consideration, some mercy! Wait in patience a little while; I ask so short a time of grace. When you remember all that has gone before can you refuse me so small a boon?"

"When I remember 'all that has gone before' I incline to bitterest judgment of your actions, to harshest strictures upon your conduct. I recall my credulity, my folly, and your wanton infidelity. Oh, Heavens! how I have loved you! On what a poor, false, weak creature I have cast my heart!"

"You hurt me," she moans, "you hurt me cruelly," and her dark eyes are full of woe.

Looking into them he is tempted to believe her true, to doubt even the evidence of his senses; and, fearing to be false to his self-respect, to all his manhood, he turns from her, glancing miserably over tree and lawn, and level, shining river.

She speaks again, in a voice bereft of all its sweetness, all its strength.

"You will know one day how you have wronged me. You will know and be sorry. Have you anything more to say to me?"

As she speaks Médé's voice floats out to them, and the words of her song reach them where they stand apart, in the clear, still light of a summer night:—

"All the dreaming is broken through,
Both what is done and undone I rue,
Nothing is steadfast, nothing is true."

"Have I anything more to say?" Dalzel breaks out, speaking loudly, as if to drown both words and music. "Yes; I have to tell you we must part; that from to-night we are strangers, each free to tread out our separate ways. You need fear nothing from me; the odium of our rupture you may cast upon me; say what you choose to your parents and friends. I shall keep your secret, for I would not put you to open shame. I would kiss you good-bye, but your lips are no longer mine; his have caressed them. I would wish you all happiness, but my heart would not go with the wish. Oh! love, love! if you had but been true!"

The air around throbs with the music of nightingales; the stars look down upon these two, heedless of their love and longing; the scent of many flowers, the murmurings of the river go to make up a scene neither will forget so long as life and memory endure.

The girl's proud, clear-cut face shows sharply against the serene sky; her figure stands out in bold relief against the background of dense trees. Dalzel can even see the quivering of her lips, the heaving of her bosom.

But why should he heed these apparent signs of distress? She has sworn to love him always, and failed. She is false in all things. Let him put her away, and that quickly, before his resolution falters.

Listen, she speaks again, and now her voice is so faint, so low, he must strain his ears if he would hear her.

"I cannot blame you that you have judged me so bitterly, because all things combine to make me appear false. But if in any time to come it will be any comfort to you remember that when you were harshest I loved you most; when you condemned me (Heaven knows how causelessly!) I forgave you; and that though I live many years, and all of them are darker and drearier than this hour in which we part, I shall bless your name and love your memory. Oh! now we are parting, kiss me; kiss me but once, and say some kind word, for to-night my heart is breaking."

"You ask for kindness who have marred and wrecked my life; you plead for caresses who have been so lavish with them to others!" he cries, beside himself with rage and agony. "Oh! heavens, how dead your conscience must have been before you could do this thing! Is it nothing to you that all my years are laid

waste? that every hope I cherished rises up to mock me in its ghastly disappointment? that for your sake I shall deem all women false?"

"You hurt me," she says again, and moans but sheds no tear.

Once more Médé's voice floats out to them.

"One word, one look, one touch of hands,
The kiss that thrills with passionate pain;
No need for foolish, idle fears,
For we may never meet again.
I blame thee not; 'tis God's decree
That lives must sometimes run apart.
But oh! my love, in losing thee
I lose the sunshine from my heart."

Mathilde lifts her white face to the sky.

"This is too hard!" she says; "too hard! Oh! Heaven, it breaks my heart!" and presses her hands to her throat.

"I do not know what explanation you will give your parents, but I am sure it will satisfy them. You have duped me so cleverly you will not fail to impose upon their credulity and affection. Now I am going. I hope we shall not meet again."

She makes no reply, and he does not seek to touch her hand or to move her to further speech. So without a word he passes out of the grounds, hearing only the burden of Médé's song,—

"Ah! no, 'tis wiser to forget
Than in such wise to meet again."

Mathilde stands a slim, desolate figure, with hands close locked, listening to the last fall of his feet, unable to see him through the mist of pain dimming her grey eyes; then, with unnatural calmness, she returns to the house, and entering unseen, glides up to her own room.

How long she sits before her open window she cannot tell, and it is with a start she comes back to a quicker, keener sense of her desolation—comes back to find Médé standing beside her.

"Why, Mathilde, where have you been?" regarding her sister's hat and wrap with curious eyes.

"Don't ask me, Médé! I must tell you as I told Dalzel, that I cannot explain my conduct. But, sister! oh, my little sister! you, at least, will trust me!" and, bowing her head upon the girl's shoulder, she bursts into a passion of tears.

"My dear! my dear! what has happened?" cries Médé, not a little alarmed by this unwonted emotion. "Have you quarrelled with Dalzel?"

"Yes; we parted not long since; he left me in angry doubt; and—oh! my heart! my heart!—we shall never meet again as lovers."

In vain Médé tries to soothe and cheer her, in vain she bids her hope that Dalzel will come to solicit forgiveness on the morrow.

"No, no!" she says; "you don't understand. We have said good-bye for ever; and remember, Médé, he is not to blame; let no one say the fault was his; I only should bear what reproach there is! I would rather die than listen again to such words as he spoke to-night! Go down, my dear; they will wonder why you are so long absent. Say I am lying down; say anything so that they do not disturb me!"

Ah! the long weary hours, which should have been so sweet, but are laden with such bitterness for the silent watcher by the window!

She leans out, and bows her face amongst the clustering roses, until their perfume makes her sick and faint.

Sometimes her low moans break the soft stillness of the night; sometimes she stretches out her white arms with a passionate gesture of despair; and sometimes with a wild prayer she lifts her wan face skywards, whilst her dark eyes seem to utter a mute protest against the burden laid upon her.

Morning comes at last, and the whole world wakes to jubilant life; a hundred birds are singing in the hedgerows and high up in the heavens, the grass and flowers sparkle under

their weight of dew, and every living thing seems glad save this white-faced girl, who whispers to her dull heart,—

"I shall never be happy any more! Heaven help me! I have bidden good-bye to all things fair and joyous. I would I were dead! Oh! I would I were dead!"

All day long she keeps her room; and when Mrs. Chauncey goes to her she tells her simply that her engagement is ended, and prays them to say no more about it to her, and, looking into her woeful eyes, her mother is fain to promise silence. So she sits alone.

She sees Bob and Mâde go down to the river, and, later on, Baby issues from the house, and after looking round cautiously, goes out upon the road, and walks swiftly in the direction of Mrs. Hatton's.

She wonders vaguely why she is alone, and then forgets her, loses all consciousness of all but her immeasurable grief.

She would be not a little surprised could she learn her cousin's errand.

On the previous day Baby had heard Dalzel say he was due at the Hattons at eleven-thirty, and, remembering this, the young lady starts in the hope of waylaying him, and working out her ultimate good.

She is not doomed to disappointment, for presently she sees him coming towards her, so changed, so dejected, that, but for the thought that he loves Mathilde, she might pity him.

When she pauses, and puts out her hand timidly, he merely touches it, then, sighing, asks her why she is alone, and so far from home.

"I thought, perhaps, I should meet you, and so came to offer you my help. Oh! Mr. Holbert! I shall never cease to reproach myself for the part I have played in your life! Let me do what I can to repair the misery I assisted in working!"

"You were not to blame; and, although I thank you for your offer, I cannot avail myself of it; there is no help for such grief as mine!"

"Let me carry some message of love or forgiveness to Mathilde."

"No, no!" he answers, wearily; then adds, suddenly, "Does she show any sign of remorse?"

Baby makes no reply, only stands with drooping head, and he reads her face aright.

"Ah! I see she does not, and her words, her looks last night were a part of the play."

"Oh! Mr. Holbert, I wish I could bear this sorrow for you!" she cries, and clasps her hands nervously, whilst she keeps her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Why should you care what I suffer?" he asks, gratefully.

She looks up suddenly then, and he staggers back as he reads his answer in the languishing brown eyes; and seeing his surprise and dismay she buries her face in her handkerchief and begins to sob piteously. Certainly Agnes Westley is no mean actress.

"Don't do that, my poor girl," Dalzel says, confusedly, "for pity's sake, don't. I'm not worth it," and then, as in a flash, the means of revenge comes to him. He is a proud man, and it is gall and wormwood to him that Mathilde should laugh at his evident misery. He will teach her he, too, can forget, he, too, can satisfy his heart with a new love. He leans nearer the weeping girl. "Listen to me, Baby; if you sob so wildly you cannot hear my words, and some one may pass us soon. You know, my dear, how madly I have loved Mathilde. You know, too, that no woman will ever be to me what she was, but if you will be content to take me as I am, with my past an open book to you, you shall never have reason to repent your decision. I will be good to you, and do my duty towards you from first to last."

"Oh!" she whispers, meekly, "will you be always satisfied with me? I am so ignorant, so foolish, and plain."

"I shall be satisfied."

She lifts her face. Is he blind that he does

not see it bears no traces of tears? Perhaps so!

He bends and touches her brow lightly with his lips.

"You've got a sorry bargain," he says, slowly. "Are you sure you'll never regret giving yourself to me?"

She thinks of his rent-roll, his position, the title one day to be his, and answers softly,—

"I shall never regret," and could laugh aloud in her triumph.

Presently she says,—

"Dalzel, I am well aware that Mathilde deserves no consideration from you, and yet I should be sorry to add to her mortification—so let our engagement remain a secret until I return home."

He is heartily glad to accept this proposal, for now he has crossed the rubicon he repents his haste. He is grateful to Baby for her love and sympathy; he likes her, too, but she is not the sort of woman he would have chosen for his wife, and his whole heart cries out for Mathilde. But he curses himself for his folly, and tells himself he will be a model husband, and tries to find consolation in the thought that he has his revenge.

But when he has kissed Baby and bidden her good-bye he says aloud,—

"Oh! what a blind fool I have been! Would to Heaven I could live over this past hour again, how differently I would act!"

He groans in the bitterness of his spirit, and goes bravely onwards. To him the world is dark, and he thinks no ray of joy will ever lift the gloom around him. Only two days ago he was her affianced husband, eagerly anticipating the hour that should make her his—and now! Well, he is a man and capable of playing his part with the best and bravest, and so, if his heart aches and his life is laid waste by a woman, who shall guess it?

Meanwhile Baby speeds homewards, pausing now and again to laugh gleefully, and to repeat again and again, "Lady Holbert, my lady Agnes," and to wonder a little what the Chaunceys will say when they learn her good fortune.

Entering the grounds she whispers,—

"And now for Bob! What an idiot he must be to suppose I would take him and his five hundred a year for better or worse. But it won't do to break with him yet—he might make mischief, and he is good fun."

Then she hurries to her room to write "ma" the good news.

CHAPTER IV.

It is a fortnight since Mathilde and Dalzel parted in the garden, and a week since Baby returned home. Before she left Bob and she had had a long conversation, the result of which was that Baby promised to marry him as soon as she could win her father's consent to the match, until which time their engagement was to be a secret, for she said,—

"Your father does not like me, and my father objects to an union between such near relatives. Besides which, he is anxious I should marry a rich man, who could give him some pecuniary assistance."

"It shall be as you wish, my darling; although I hate deceit of any kind."

"I, too," she had answered, with a tender glance. "It is only the fear that even a correspondence between us should be forbidden that leads me to urge silence upon you."

Poor, foolish Bob! how implicitly he had believed her! how madly he loved her! And when she was gone how desolate the house appeared without her! He caught himself often listening for her step, her voice, her laugh; and yearned for her with all the fervour of an impulsive, honest nature.

So she had left him, without one feeling of pity or remorse for the part she had played; without one fear of what his future might be. And when she remembered him it was only to laugh over his infatuation, and to congratulate herself on her powers of fascination.

She and her worthy mother discussed

Mathilde in a light and airy fashion, and triumphed in her disappointment.

Meanwhile the rupture between Dalzel and his fiancée has scarcely been a nine days' wonder; people have speculated a little on the cause of their quarrel and then ceased to be interested. The girl herself goes about no paler, no quieter than before; only in the dark grey eyes the shadows lie deep and unbroken; but her lips smile, her voice is ready with the jest, and no one save Mâde guesses how cruel is the wound she has sustained.

Dalzel has gone to Scotland for a few weeks, partly to avoid his uncle, who has taken great umbrage at his nephew's conduct, Mathilde being a favourite with him.

"I'll lay you ten to one," he says, "that the fault is yours. Why the deuce can't you humble your pride and confess yourself in the wrong? She loves you well enough to forgive you any indiscretion."

"It is useless to talk, uncle; Miss Chauncey and I have agreed it is best to make our parting final." And he will say no more upon the subject.

One night Mr. and Mrs. Chauncey with Mâde attend the Opera; Mathilde declines joining them on the plea that she has heard *Faust* until she is weary of it.

Bob is dining with young Hatton at his chambers, and she is free to do as she will. When it has grown dusk she goes slowly to her room and dresses for walking. Going down again she meets a maid, whom she informs that she has been called out suddenly to see a sick friend, and declining any escort, passes through the grounds and is met by her Italian acquaintance.

"Well, Manuel?" she says, questioningly. And then seeing the heavy sadness of his face, her own shadows deeply, and she lays her hand upon his arm with a sympathetic touch.

"Is she worse?"

"Yes," and the musical voice grows hoarse and broken; "weaker each day, each hour. Oh, Heaven! to see her wasting before me, to have no power to arrest her disease, to stand helplessly by while she is drifting away from me!"

He makes a passionate gesture of despair, and begins to walk so quickly that she has almost to run to keep pace with him.

"We have been so happy, despite our poverty; she had no sorrow, save that caused by her separation from her friends. And through all our trials, in all our difficulties, she loved me and clung to me—has been as a sunbeam in our home. And now—and now—she is going from me!"

Mathilde has no words of comfort to offer, her own heart aches so terribly. Presently her companion turns to her.

"There, I will be calm!" he says; "I must, for her sake. Mathilde, may Heaven bless you for all your goodness! But for you she would have starved. She could not have eaten the poor food it was in my power to obtain."

"Do not speak of the little services I have rendered. It would have been my duty (even if my love had gone from her) to do my utmost for her."

Here Manuel hails a cab, and they are soon driving rapidly by all the pleasant places Mathilde knows so well; nor do they pause until they have fairly entered Camden Town.

The cabman pulls up before one of a row of mongre-looking houses, and Manuel, assisting his companion to alight, bids him wait for her return.

They go up the narrow, dingy staircase together, and enter a small room, scrupulously neat and clean, but boasting little other furniture than a bed, upon which lies a woman, evidently in the last stage of consumption. It is impossible to tell her age, and if she had ever been beautiful, the awful disease of which she is dying has destroyed all traces of her loveliness. A bright spot burns upon either hollow cheek, and her hazel eyes look too large for the woefully wasted face. But long, bright masses of rippling golden hair flood

her pillows, fall about her throat and bosom, and make a halo about her head.

As the two enter she smiles, and probably the smile is the ghastliest expression she could wear. She stretches out one hand to Manuel.

"My darling," she says, scarcely above a whisper, "I am glad you have come back. You must never leave me any more, lest I should die in your absence."

He kneels beside her, hiding his face in her rippling hair, and she addresses Mathilde.

"You notice the great change in me? Come nearer. Kiss me, sister, the end is so near now. I release you from your promise. I should like them to know I am here. I should like to say good-bye to them all. Oh! my poor Manuel, what will you do without me?"

"Hush, Thyra," he says, hoarsely. "I cannot bear it. Oh, Heaven! what have I done that I should suffer thus?"

With an indescribably pathetic gesture, she lays her hand upon his bowed head.

"You make it so hard for me to go," she says, and leans nearer to kiss him. "I wish I could have stayed with you. We have been so happy."

Once again the too bright eyes fall upon her sister's face.

"What has changed you?" she says. "You are not the Mathilde of two weeks since."

In pity for her, Mathilde does not tell her that the promise imposed upon her has, to all intents and purposes, ruined her life; she answers, steadily,—

"My dear, how could I remain unchanged, seeing you as you are, knowing what I know?"

But Thyra Carlavero is not satisfied; still she does not question her sister further, and during Mathilde's stay the talk is chiefly of their parents. At last the girl rises to go, and Manuel escorts her downstairs.

"Let come what may," she says, "I shall be with you to-morrow." Then she steps into the cab, and is driven home.

She does not go to her room, but waits for her parents' return, sitting with her chin in her hollowed palm, thinking of many things; and through all her sadness, through all her grief for Thyra, a great light of hope shines in her eyes. She is free now to explain all that had been strange in her conduct; surely it will not be unmanly to recall Dalzel.

Oh! the rapture of that meeting! She can picture to herself his very expression as he begs her forgiveness for his harsh judgment, his cruel words; she hears the tones of his familiar voice, and her heart beats faster with her love and longing.

Then she hears the sound of carriage wheels upon the drive, and sits silent, waiting for her parents and Médé to enter. Bob is with them, having joined them late at the Opera. He comes in with Médé on his arm, laughing and jesting.

It strikes Mathilde with a cruel pang, this contrast between her elder and younger sister.

Médé is at her best and brightest, her eyes gleam like stars, and there is a soft colour upon her daintily rounded cheeks. As she moves forward, her dress glistens crimson and gold in the gleaming lights, and her jewels flash with her every gesture.

"Well, my most demure of sisters, how have you spent your evening?" she asks, drawing off her gloves, and sinking into a chair.

Mathilde rises, a trifle paler than usual, a little tremulous, and places her hands upon a table as if to steady herself.

"Papa," she says, in a low, uncertain voice, "I have a confession to make."

"This promises to be tragic," murmurs Médé, *sotto voce*; but, unheeding the interruption, her sister goes on,—

"To begin with, I must mention a name you have forbidden to be spoken here."

"Not here," Mr. Chauncey interpolates, harshly. "You know the penalty!"

"Yes," more calmly now, "I do; but circumstances have arisen to compel me to

disobedience. Dear father, I have seen her, not once, but often lately, and in her home."

"Oh!" cries Médé, springing up, "where is she? Take me to her! No, father, I will speak! I have been silent too long, and now I will say what I have always thought. You have been most cruel to her, and cruel to us in forbidding any correspondence—"

"Hush! hush! my child," entreats Mrs. Chauncey. "You forget you are speaking to your father."

"No, I don't," careless of the heavy frown upon her father's brow; but here Mathilde says quickly,—

"Do not quarrel now. Poor Thyra will soon be beyond both your anger and scorn. She is dying in a poor lodging in Camden-town."

For a moment there is a dead silence, then the sound of weeping, as Mrs. Chauncey flings herself on her husband's breast, crying,—

"Oh, my dear, my dear, forgive her now, and let me go to her!"

He makes no answer. He looks dazedly round at Bob's white face, and Médé, who sits with bowed head. Then he groans aloud, and trembles like a child.

After a moment or two he puts his wife gently away.

"Take me to her, Mathilde," he says; "I have stole my heart too long against her."

In the grey of a dull summer morning they are all gathered about Thyra's bed. Manuel kneels at her right hand, her father and mother at her left.

She is speaking, in a voice so faint and low that those further away can scarcely hear her words.

"I want you to promise me, father, to help my poor Manuel, for my sake. He has had such a terrible struggle. We have suffered much; but when he could he hid all anxiety from me, gave me the pleasant things, and bore the sad uncomplainingly. I don't regret the step I took five years since; I never did, save that it estranged your heart from me. Oh! I do not grieve so bitterly! Believe me, I intended no reproach. But give me your promise. I cannot die without it!"

"I promise, my child. Oh! if you knew how terrible is my remorse for the inhuman part I played towards you—if you could forgive me!"

"I did that from the first. How could I do otherwise when I thought of all the years that had gone before, when I was your dear and honoured child? Mathilde, my dearest, come nearer, I cannot see you where you stand. I want to thank you for all you endured and did for my sake. I shall not trouble any of you long now," with a faint smile. "Oh, my dear, when Dalzel makes you his wife, remember me in that hour of your joy. Do not quite forget my earnest prayers that your life may be more glad than mine—that his love may be as endearing as my Manuel's."

The girl's heart aches, and she longs to entreat silence of her sister, only that she will not pain her in this her last hour.

"I shall never forget you, my darling," she says. "Your memory will be with me through all my life."

The room grows suddenly quiet, save for Thyra's deep drawn, gasping breath, and the watchers wait for the end, which is now so mercifully near.

Presently she stretches out her hand aimlessly.

"Manuel," she whispers, "Manuel"—and he takes her in his arms, lays her bright head upon her breast, whilst a rush of awful tears blinds him, and holds him speechless—"we have been so happy!" she gasps.

He stoops to kiss her, whilst his agonised tears fall fast upon her face. Then a short, sharp struggle, which is awful to see; then the pinched features settle into a calmness which shall never be disturbed.

Four days later they bury poor Thyra, and Mr. Chauncey insists that Manuel Carlavero shall return with the mourners, and remain at Montrose Villa until some suitable employment has been obtained for him.

"Heaven knows I have been hard enough with you," he says, contritely. "Let me make what atonement I can. I fancy my poor child will see my efforts, and be satisfied."

So Manuel returns with them, and the sight of his patient grief, his haggard face, and sunken, woful eyes might well touch a harder heart than Mr. Chauncey's.

He and Mathilde seem to find consolation in each other's society, and Médé does all in her power to brighten his dark life, and lift the gloom from his spirit.

"You will write to Dalzel now?" says the latter to Mathilde one morning as they go down to breakfast, for Mathilde has confided her whole story to her.

"Yes; I will write to-day. I have only waited for his return to England."

When they enter the room they find Mr. Chauncey reading his paper. Suddenly he looks up, and, calling Mathilde to him, says, pitifully,—

"My dear, you have need of all your courage. But it is best you should know the worst at once. Listen:—"

"We understand that a marriage has been arranged between Mr. Dalzel Holbert and Miss Agnes Westley, only child of Mr. Westley, of The Grange, Stretherton. The ceremony will take place in September."

With an oath Bob starts up.

"It is a lie!" he says, hoarsely; "a foul lie!"

CHAPTER V.

Is the astonishment which follows Bob's outcry Mathilde is for the moment forgotten. No one sees that sudden, wild gesture of her hands to her head, or the contortion of her features, which for a time are so changed as to be beyond recognition.

She shrinks away from them all, and, to her numbed senses, their words, their voices sound indistinct and far away.

"Bob," says Médé, "what is it? Why should you doubt the truth of this paragraph?"

"Because she is betrothed to me!" he answers, sharply. "It can't be! I won't believe it! She would never play me so falsely!"

"My poor boy!" she says, pitifully, "I am afraid it is too true. Now, Mathilde," turning to her sister, "we can understand Dalzel Holbert's conduct. I no longer wonder he could not keep his faith in you, seeing he was enamoured of the Country Innocent?"

"Hush!" says Mathilde, in a low, strange voice. "I want to think this out. I—I am afraid I don't quite understand. I had hoped he would return to me when he knew the whole truth; but—but that is over," and suddenly she covers her face and breaks into piteous moans, but does not weep.

In a moment Médé is by her side.

"Oh, my poor heart, my poor heart! come away! Let me take you to your room," and she throws an arm about her sister's waist. "Oh, if I were a man for one hour! Some one I know should suffer for this!"

Manuel rises and opens the door for them. Bending over Mathilde he says,—

"Am I in any way concerned in this?"

She hesitates a little, then answers,—

"No; how should you be?" and allows Médé to lead her upstairs. Outside her own door she pauses. "Leave me here; I am best alone."

And, going in, casts herself face downwards on the bed, and lies there motionless and silent through the long bright hours of the summer morn, incapable of thought or action—only conscious of her heart's distress.

Later in the day Médé steals up to her.

"My dear," she whispers, laying her cheek

against the dishevelled masses of hair, "Bob has started for Stretherton, thinking to find this report false. If it should be so, you will let me tell Dalzel the whole truth of the matter."

"Ah! but Bob will come back broken-hearted, having found himself deserted and betrayed for a more eligible suitor," Mathilde answers, bitterly. "Now I have heard this thing I can read between the lines, and I see how and why I lost my lover."

"I wish Agnes had never come amongst us; we were happy enough until her advent."

"Don't wish that," swiftly; "it has saved me from marrying a man wholly unworthy of trust; it has shown me the folly of loving as I have loved him. Go downstairs again, Médé; Manuel will find the day long if left to his own devices; tell mamma I shall be down to dinner."

Meanwhile poor Bob is hurrying towards Stretherton; his honest young face wearing such a look of misery that motherly women pityingly wonder what trouble this lad is enduring. Try as he will he cannot rid himself of the fear that the paragraph in the *Morning Herald* is all too true. He remembers how Baby had persisted on keeping the fact of their engagement a secret from all; he begins to see through her plausible excuses, calls to mind her friendly interest in Dalzel, and yet in his honesty makes a desperate effort to keep his faith in her.

It is late in the afternoon when he reaches Stretherton, and quitting the station he hastens in the direction of the Grange; but he is not destined to reach the house; crossing a stile midway between the village and Baby's residence he sees the girl herself coming towards him.

She is wearing a cool dress of some pale blue material, with bunches of poppies at her throat and waist, and has a bouquet of the same in her hand. Her hair floats about her in untidy masses, and she has never appeared to such small advantage as now. As she draws nearer her cousin, and recognises him, she learns by the expression of his eyes that he has heard of her treachery. But she feels no compunction, does not tremble or experience either fear or remorse, only goes forward with a bold look on her face, which wholly robs it of any prettiness it may usually have.

She extends her hand to him in an airy fashion.

"Why, Bob, this is an unexpected pleasure; why did you not write us of your intention to visit us?"

"Until this morning," he says, in a laboured way (being struck to the heart by her casual greeting), "I had no thought of coming. Baby, is this true that I have heard?"

"Pray be more explicit," she answers, playing with her flowers; "how can I tell what you have heard; you forget in what an isolated place I live."

The careless insolence of her tone, the cold cruelty of her glance, should be sufficient answer; but he cannot yet resign all hope—all faith. He tries to possess himself of her hands, and after a feint of avoiding his clasp she allows it.

"Is it true, Agnes, that you are pledged to marry Dalzel Holbert?"

How hoarse his voice is, how wild his eyes! She looks into his face and smiles.

"Why, of course it is true. Won't you congratulate me?"

He drops her hands with a bitter curse.

"Heavens, how false you women are!"

"You are not very complimentary," she says, dippantly; "and pray, in what are men more faithful than we. Did not Dalzel Holbert desert Mathilde?"

"Baby," he cries, wrathfully, "leave my sister out of the discussion; if all women were as good and pure as she the world would be a better place, and I should be a happier man than I am to-day;" then relapsing into tenderness he pleads with her to unsay her words, and she listens with a cruel smile; and when at last he pauses, says coolly,—

"Your eloquence is so high-flown that I am inclined to believe you have been indulging in a course of old-world romances."

"Did you never love me?" he questions, heavily, his gloomy eyes resting on her with hungering love; "did you never love me, Baby?"

Her blithe laugh smites on the warm, soft air.

"Why, Bob, you understood as well as I that we were flirting, and nothing more. And for the pleasant times we had together I thank you. You were a very jolly companion."

He looks at her in a dazed way, and is very slow to answer.

"Then there was nothing serious in your regard for me? You were fooling me the whole while?" and surely the suppressed anguish in his tone should touch her to pity. But no, she laughs again, more blithely than before.

"Why, you unsophisticated Bcb. Of course we were amusing ourselves! It was only a summer flirtation, and now that it is over let us forget it."

A sudden change comes over his face, pain and dismay are swallowed up in an overwhelming rage.

"What has been amusement to you has been little short of death to me; but if you think to go unpunished for your treachery you are deluding yourself miserably. I am going to Holbert. I shall tell him my story in all its hideous details. See if he will be as anxious then to make you his wife—to incur his uncle's anger for your sake; see if his so-called love can stand the test. He is an honourable man."

She smiles, although her face has grown white with fear.

"An honourable man would scarcely desert his betrothed (as he did Mathilde) without cause."

"How do I know you did not win him away by lies and subtlety? How do I know what cursed wiles you used? I am inclined to pity him, when I think how you have fooled me. Heavens! I believed you all that was good and true—trusted my happiness to your keeping."

"That was a foolish thing to do, seeing women are prone to change. And am I the first girl who has whiled away a few weeks by a pronounced flirtation? What will you say if I tell you Mr. Holbert is acquainted with your folly, and has laughed with me over it?"

"That you are lying to me, as you have done throughout," he cries, fiercely.

"That is scarcely a gentlemanly speech; but taking your disappointment into consideration I am inclined to treat you leniently."

Once again he possesses himself of her hands.

"Are you in jest or earnest?"

"In sober earnest. Have I not shown you that already?" growing impatient.

"Oh, Baby! is my love as nothing to you? Can you send me away like this? If you are false I don't care what becomes of me, I shall go to the dogs by the quickest way I can find. I was so sure of you, my dear; I gave myself so entirely to you. You cannot refuse me your pity. You have played with me long enough."

"True," she says, callously. "I have trifled with you too long. You have now become a nuisance," and not all the misery on his boyish face can move her even to a semblance of tenderness.

"And you will marry this man?" with ominous calmness; "this man whom you describe as not honourable."

"Mr. Holbert's private character does not affect my decision in the least; but his fortune and future position recommend him strongly to my favour. He is far and away the most eligible parti it has been my luck to meet."

"If it lies in my power to thwart your wishes, and spoil your plans, I warn you that I shall do so." He does not entreat with, or

rage at her now; his manner is marked by a simple dignity, new in her experience of him.

"I have loved you well, but knowing you as I now do I would not marry you, even to save my life from shipwreck. Such women as you are a curse upon earth—a shame to your sex. I am leaving you now, I hope, for ever, and, to be perfectly frank with you, I am going to Holbert. I fancy, when he hears my version of the story, he will not esteem you so highly as now. I wish we could have parted friends, but that is impossible. I cannot even pray Heaven bless you."

And so, without a farewell, without one glance into her angry, frightened eyes, he leaves her standing by the stile.

He returns to the station and takes a ticket for South Kensington, at which place he arrives at 8.30; from thence he drives to Holbert's chambers, and is lucky enough to find him in. Without any preface he plunges at once into his story, Dalzel listening with momentarily darkening face and lowering brow.

When he has finished the latter rises.

"Thank you for saving me from the folly of marrying such a woman. I never loved her, and it was only in a fit of pique I asked her to be my wife. These women are all alike, and you and I having discovered this should be content to remain bachelors," and he laughs shortly and drearily.

"Holbert, what parted you and Mathilde? I dare swear she loves you."

"That rests between ourselves. I would not seem to blame her, and the mere fact of her having given you no explanations proves she wishes the cause of our parting to remain a secret. I am yet foolish enough to respect her wish."

For two days Baby waits in fear and trembling for some sign of displeasure from her fiancé, and on the third (as none appears) she flatters herself that Bob's threat has been an idle one. But the fourth brings her a letter, from Dalzel, in which he begs her to consider herself free, and assures her that had he known of her prior engagement he would not have asked her in marriage, as his heart had never been in her keeping. And he concludes with some terse, stern strictures on her conduct.

She knows the manner of man she has to deal with, and makes no attempt to conciliate him; but she finds her home so uncomfortable after this rupture, her mother so hard to please, and her father complaining always of impending ruin, that she determines to throw herself on Bob's mercy.

"Better five hundred a-year and a cottage than nothing at all," she thinks; so she writes him a pathetic letter, lamenting her past conduct, and praying his forgiveness and love.

The letter is returned to her without a remark of any kind; and the next week she hears that Dalzel has left England for a trip up the Rhine.

CHAPTER VI.

It is September, and the Chaunceys are staying at the quiet but extremely pretty watering-place known as Clevedon. To Bob the days are intolerably long, for he has not forgotten his love, or lived down his pain, and cannot enter into the various amusements with his old-acquainted zest. In Mathilde there is no very visible change. Perhaps she is fonder of solitude than she once was, and apt to grow weary of the little compliments and attentions paid her. But she never refers to her broken engagement, or mentions Dalzel's name, and her parents hope in time she will cease to regret him.

But Médé, made wise by her love for Fred Hope, to whom she is now betrothed, knows better, and there is a hot resentment in her heart against Dalzel. She has not spared him either to Fred or Manuel, neither will she spare him when they chance to meet—so she tells herself.

Now on a warm, soft morning she walks

along a green lane, and presently, leaning over the wall, looks down upon the gardens, with their archery and tennis-grounds, lying so far below, that the men and maidens, sitting to and fro, look like mere children; and she turns her face towards Fred with an expression of contentment upon it.

"I feel 'it is good for us to be here,'" she says, in lazy, low tones. "What a pretty place it is! and how pleasant the faint sound of the sea! Fred, wouldn't you like a sail this morning?"

"Certainly," he acquiesces. "Let us go down and charter a boat."

They begin to walk in the direction of the pier, pausing, however, upon a green, overhanging hill, around which the waves are dashing somewhat boisterously; then Médé sinks down, altogether regardless of briars and thistles, which threaten to make havoc with her dress.

"I've changed my mind, Fred; let us stay here."

"With all my heart," he answers, well pleased to look into her eyes.

"What a delightfully amenable boy you are!" she says, lightly, and he leans towards her to snatch a kiss, but she starts back. "Pray have some regard for Mrs. Grundy," laughing. "See, there is a man toiling up here."

Fred murmurs something the reverse of complimentary to the intruder, and endeavours to fix him (even at a distance) with a stony stare. But as he comes nearer, and his features become more distinct, he exclaims,—

"By Jupiter, it is Holbert! Shall we beat a retreat?"

"No," she answers, decidedly. "I should very much like to meet him face to face," and Médé's eyes flash dangerously.

She rises as she speaks, and shakes out the folds of her heavy black dress. Now Dalzel is very near, and he starts violently when he recognises her, but comes forward at once and offers his hand, which she refuses to take, although Fred does not.

"Médé," he says, hesitatingly—and a look of fear comes into his eyes as they take in the details of her heavy mourning—"Médé, I am afraid you have suffered some severe loss? I am ignorant as to which friend you mourn, having returned to England but yesterday."

A softer look comes over the girl's face, and her voice is low as she answers,—

"My sister is dead," forgetting what construction he may put upon her words.

"Mathilde!"

Oh! the anguish in the changed and broken tones—the terrible grief in the dark eyes! Surely she can no longer doubt his love for her sister?

"No," she says, gently, "my eldest sister, Thyrsa. Fred, will you leave us? I should like to speak with Mr. Holbert alone;" and as soon as Fred has gone a stone's throw she begins,—

"Oh! how could you so doubt her? How could you so lightly throw her aside for such a creature as Agnes Westley?"

"I had such terrible proof of her treachery—such apparent evidence of Miss Westley's innocence and love; but I tell you, Médé, I never loved Mathilde more than when I asked another woman to be my wife."

Médé looks incredulous, but says merely,—

"If you had been more patient you would have learned the whole truth in the course of three weeks. My sister did not linger long after the rupture between Mathilde and you."

He is still pale from the effect of her first words, but his voice is tolerably under control as he questions,—

"Your sister? This is the first time I have heard that there was another daughter."

"Yes, because we were forbidden to speak of her. She had offended my father almost past forgiveness, and he vowed if one of us held any sort of correspondence with her, that one should be cast not only out of his heart

but his home. Sit down, Mr. Holbert, and let me tell you the whole story."

Without a word he obeys, and she, sitting at a little distance from him, begins her tale.

"I am eight years younger than Thyrsa, and as her marriage took place six years ago, you will readily believe me when I say I remember very little about it personally, and that as I tell the story it has been told to me. But I remember Thyrsa as she was at seventeen quite well—the prettiest, gentlest, most lovable of sisters; not clever in the least, and apparently without much force of character. Well, she and Mathilde were together at Mme. Lecroix's seminary, only Mathilde was accounted one of the young ones, whilst Thyrsa was a senior girl.

"At that time, the drawing master was an Italian, a political refugee; his name Manuel Carlavero. He was handsome, young, and of gentle birth, and being much with my sister (who had a talent for drawing), he naturally fell in love with her, and soon became convinced that she reciprocated his passion. He persuaded her to marry him secretly, and, when the ceremony was over, he brought her to her own friends, begging their forgiveness for the rash step.

"My father naturally believed him to be an adventurer, and, despite my mother's entreaties, forbade Thyrsa to enter the house again, and swore that if any of the household were bold enough to name her in his presence, that one should be instantly thrust out—to thrive or starve as fate willed.

"No one ventured openly to disobey him, for, although an easy man as a rule, he is terrible when really roused, and so six years went by, and we were ignorant whether Thyrsa were alive or dead. But one morning, walking with you, Mathilde saw Manuel by the roadside, and, despite the change in him, recognised him that night, and often afterwards she met him, and went with him to Camden Town, where our sister lay dying in great poverty.

"She wanted to tell you the whole story then, but Thyrsa extorted a promise from her not to do so, as she feared it might prejudice you against the alliance you then wished to form. Then one night she met Manuel, and learned from him that the end was very near, and would hold her peace no longer. She told papa all, and when he heard of the terrible straits to which his daughter had been reduced he was like a madman. Poor Thyrsa! We were all with her when she died, and she had no reproachful words for any of us, uttered scarcely a complaint concerning the hardships of those six long years.

"It appears that at times she and Manuel actually wanted bread. He tried everywhere for work of some kind, but Mme. Lecroix would give him no testimonials, and that, of course, went against him; but it seems that through all his distresses he never spoke a harsh word to his wife or loved her less, and of course, she was a burden to him, being ignorant of all things necessary for a poor man's wife to know, and not having much aptitude for learning them.

"When we had buried her, Mathilde thought of writing you a detailed account, which would explain all, and clear her conduct; but then came the news of your fresh betrothal. Oh! why did you fail her so miserably? Why did you wound her so cruelly?" and now her dark eyes flash, and the passionate colour rises to her cheeks. "How low you must have fallen to cast your heart on such a creature as my cousin!"

"Médé, I swear I have loved Mathilde first and last!"

"Then all I wish to say is that you men have a queer way of showing your love."

"I think I was mad when I asked Miss Westley to be my wife."

"You must have been," bluntly, "and certainly as blind as a mole to her artifices. I believe she plotted from the first to steal you from Mathilde. Confess now, did she not in-

form you of Mathilde's meetings with our brother-in-law?"

"Yes, but with a most perfect imitation of pity and distress."

"I can quite believe that. To give the sweet Baby her due she is a clever actress, that is, in low comedy; tragedy is a trifle beyond her powers."

"And have you forgiven me the misery I have caused?" he asks.

"No, because it is not yet remedied. You can't think how awfully I have grieved over your horrid conduct, for I *did* like you once; but I hope with all my heart you have suffered severely. You deserve to have done so, because of your ready distrust of Mathilde."

"You shall say all the hard things you like to-day, for you have told me joyful news. Even if I have sinned beyond forgiveness, it will comfort me to remember Mathilde was true to me. Do you think she will see me? Do you think she will be ready to forget all that has passed, and renew the old relationship?"

"How can I tell? I only know were I in her place I would treat you as you deserve. Oh! there would be small fear of your missing the reward of your merits!"

"True; but Mathilde is Mathilde!"

"What a piece of reasoning! Now, Mr. Holbert, I am going to join Mr. Hope. I can see he is growing impatient."

"Then all has happened with you as I prophesied?" he asks, half mischievously, and her only answer is a vivid blush, which heightens her charms. "I am going with you, Médé, if you will allow me; I cannot spend another hour in delaying putting my fate to the test."

"You can come if you choose. I dare say we shall find Mathilde at home."

"Would it be very hard, Médé, to call me Dalzel? You used to."

"I shall be governed in all things concerning you by Mathilde; and then the trio proceeded to the villa occupied by the Chaunceys.

In answer to Médé's inquiries they hear that Mathilde is in the breakfast-room alone, and directing him thither, Médé wanders away with her lover.

In some doubt as to his reception, with a mad longing in his heart to catch the woman he loves to him, and swear never to loose her until all is forgiven, he enters. Oh! what need has he for fear? As she hears his step Mathilde turns, and with a swift cry goes towards him.

"Dalzel! oh, Dalzel! at last. How could you leave me so long? Oh! my love, my love!" and then she is caught close indeed, kissed again and again, and listens to wild words of love and longing she had thought never to hear from him any more.

Manuel Carlavero has found suitable employment at last, and his leisure hours are equally divided between Mathilde and her father-in-law, who has grown to feel a very real esteem and affection for him.

Mathilde is Dalzel's happy wife, and there is no cloud upon her sky, no wish of her heart ungratified, save that Médé's home were not so far removed from them all.

Bob has long ago forgotten his old infatuation, but he has taken no new love to himself; and the Country Innocent?—well, troubles have been showered heavily upon her. Mr. Westley's name long since appeared in the *Gazette*, and the Grange was sold, the family separated, Agnes going to live with a maiden aunt. She has found no new lovers, and there is very little likelihood that she will do so, as her plumpness has developed into absolute fatness, and she is what Médé emphatically describes as "blowsy."

[THE END.]

To adapt himself to every temper and to every change of life is peculiarly the business of a wise man.

FACETIÆ.

LITERARY MAN (laughing): "Yes, I took to literature naturally. I was vaccinated from a quill, you know." Friend (grimly): "The world would have been the gainer if you had been vaccinated from a pick and shovel."

MAMMA, what's a bookworm? "One who loves to read and study and collect books, my dear." The next night company called. Miss Edith, who wears rings innumerable, was present. "Oh, mamma, look at Miss Edith's ring. I guess she's a ringworm, ain't she?"

"Good-morning, Mistress Gilligan, how is Patrick this morning?" "Sure he's no better, sir." "Why don't you send him to the hospital to be treated?" "To be treated, is it? Faith! an' it's the delirium trimmings he had already."

"But, Tommy, you really must not eat so much; you'll make yourself sick." "No, I won't, mamma." "Yes, you will; you've already eaten so much that I expect you feel very uncomfortable." "No, I don't, mamma; I do feel smooth."

BEREAVED WIDOW (to undertaker): "Have you not made a slight mistake in your bill, Mr. Mould?" Mr. Mould: "No, I think not, madam." Bereaved Widow: "I see you have charged for fifteen carriages. I am quite sure there were but fourteen. I counted them on leaving the church, and also the grave."

"Did you attend church, my daughter?" "Yes, papa." "How did you like the sermon?" "Well, the minister stuck to his text, and I must say delivered a very cheerful though somewhat unseasonable discourse." "What was the text?" "Many are cold but few are frozen."

UNCLE THOMAS (to his nephew): "You see, my boy, it is to your interest that I live as long as possible. I am not extravagant, and the longer I live the more money I will leave." Tommy Jr. (with a gracious smile): "Of course, uncle; but it is wise to exaggerate nothing."

MAUD and her George were in the parlour, and Maud's father—who, by the way, is down on the mugwumps—was laying down his political tenets to Maud's George: "I tell you," he exclaimed, "the democratic and republican parties embody all there is of wisdom in party management. We don't want any third party here." "That is it precisely, papa," replied Maud; "a third party is a nuisance anywhere." Maud's father counted noses, concluded he was the mugwump, and withdrew from the field.

FARMER (to physician): "If you get out my way, doctor, any time, I wish you'd stop and see my wife. She says she ain't feelin' well." Physician: "What are some of her symptoms?" Farmer: "I dunno. This mornin', after she had milked the cows, an' fed the stock, an' got breakfast for the hands, an' washed the dishes, an' built a fire under the soft-soap kettle in the lane, an' done a few chores 'bout the house, she complained o' feelin' kinder tired. I shouldn't be surprised if her blood was out of order. I guess she needs a dose of medicine."

A NEAT PROPOSAL.—Enthusiastic young lady: "Is that boat the *Gracie*, Mr. Smith, and that the *Fanny*, and that lovely long, white, thin yacht the *Heen*? What pretty names! Do they name them after their sisters—or or their friends?" Mr. Smith: "Generally after their friends. Sisters very seldom have pretty names." "Have you a yacht, Mr. Smith?" "No, but I am building one now." And what is her name? "She hasn't any. I thought of calling her after you, if you would not be ashamed of her." "Oh, how lovely! My name is Elizabeth, you know. What will you call her? Lizzie, or Bessie, or just Bess?" "I didn't think of any of those names. I think I would rather call her the *Mrs. Smith*."

THE main reason why so many men have family trouble is that most of them marry a miss.

THE Zulu lady wears her wedding-ring in her nose. A double purpose is thus served. It discourages promiscuous kissing, and she is in little danger of losing her ring. She always nose where it is.

"Oh!" gasped fat Mrs. Weighty, as she ascended the second flight of stairs in her new residence. "I really cannot run up any more stairs." "Of course not," testily answered her husband; "but if the stairs were made of dressmakers' bills, you could run them up very easily."

"This is my last birthday," said a handsome girl to her adorer on the 29th of August. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed, clutching at his heart. "You are not going to die, are you?" "Well, I should hope not. I'm twenty-one to-day, and a woman never has a birthday after that, you know."

SUCH POLITENESS.—Scene: A fashionable West-end shop. Enter a lady of title, addressing a shop-walker: "I wish to exchange something I bought yesterday." "Yes, madam. Do you remember whether you were attended by the gentleman with the dark moustache, or the gentleman with the light beard?" "Oh, neither! It was the nobleman with the bald head."

FRIVOLOUS Young Lady (to guide): "How deep is this hole?" Guide: "Never been measured, miss." Frivolous Young Lady: "Suppose I were to fall down there, where do you suppose I should go to?" Guide: "That depends, miss, upon how you have lived in this world."

FAMILY PHYSICIAN: "Well, I must congratulate you." Patient (quite excited): "I shall recover?" Family physician: "Not exactly, but—well, after consultation, we find that your disease is entirely novel, and, if the autopsy should demonstrate that fact, we have decided to name it after you."

COMPLIMENTARY.—"What's the matter, my dear?" said a kind wife to her husband, who had sat for half-an-hour with his face buried in his hands, and apparently in great tribulation. "Oh, I don't know," he groaned; "I've felt like a fool all day." "Well," said his wife, consolingly, "you look the very picture of what you feel."

"Pa," said a little boy, "what is a green grocer?" "One who trusts, my son." "Why is he green because he trusts *your* son?" asked the little boy; and the father looked at him doubtfully, as though he were wondering whether the child's question indicated infantile greenness or dangerous precocity.

THE following anecdote is related of President Lincoln. One evening Mrs. Lincoln swept magnificently dressed into the library where the President was waiting to escort her into the brilliant reception parlour. Her dress had a very long train, and was cut low at the neck. Lincoln was standing with his back to the fire when his wife entered. "Whew!" said old Abe, "What a long tail our cat has to-night!" Mrs. Lincoln made no answer, and the President continued: "Say, mother, don't you think it would be better if some of our cat's tail was around her neck?"

The other evening, just before sundown, a gentleman who was sitting by his window casually remarked: "There goes the woman that George Brown's dead gone on." His wife, who was in the room getting supper ready, dropped a plate on the floor, tumbled over the baby, and ran like a lamp-lighter to the window with, "Where?—where? Tell me quick!" "The one with the long cloak—just at the corner." Then the woman at the window said, in deep disgust: "Why, that's his wife." "Yes, exactly," remarked the brutal husband, quietly. Then the disappointed woman went back and got supper ready, but her usually sweet disposition was soured for the entire evening.

AN old lady wants to know what good the new French cable is going to do to those who don't understand French.

SOPHRONIA asks: "Did people in olden times know anything of sleighing?" Yes; the ancient warriors used to go out slaying in their scythe-armed chariots.

"Look here, Judge," said the burglar, "I ain't so bad as you think I am. Only give me time, and I'll reform." And the judge gave him fifteen years.

STRANGE SIGHTS.—Some people assert that they have seen a horse *draw*, a bell *pull*, a lamp of coal *smoke*, and a wheel *writ* (wheelwright).

AN unsuccessful politician says that the most difficult vacancies for him to fill are the vacancies in his own and his family's stomachs.

A WICKED bachelor says, that no matter whom you marry, you will find afterwards that you have married a different person.

A WEST of England grocer informs his customers and the public generally that he has "Knew Syder for Sail."

KISSES are the right kind of snacks to sail down the stream of life with, although taking a buss is not bad.

SOME travellers tell dreadful stories about the native bandits of Italy; but what are they in comparison with some of the brass band-its of our own native land?

SMILES.—"John," said a patient wife to a dissipated husband, "I would rather you'd have one smile on your face than half-a-dozen in a tumbler."

Two men were conversing the other day, and one of them asked the other when he intended to go back home, the person addressed having come from Europe. He replied: "If I live till I die—and Heaven knows whether I will or not—I intend to visit my native land once more before I leave this country."

GENTLE REMINDER.—One Sabbath afternoon a worthy minister, observing by the time he had reached the third "head" of his discourse the drowsy disposition of several of his hearers, quietly remarked: "In the first place, those of you who are awake will notice," &c.

A THRIFTY and cynical old bachelor promulgates the following advice for those about to marry: "Never marry a woman unless she is so rich that you would marry her if she were ugly, and so handsome that you would marry her if she were poor."

A LADY recently attended a funeral in a country church. After the singing of a hymn a man who was sitting beside her remarked, with an air of intense local pride: "Beautiful hymn, isn't it, ma'am? The corpse wrote it."

A MODERN FABLE.—A boy undertook to torture a wasp by touching a lighted match to its body. The wasp planted a burning sting in the boy's hand, and as it flew away gave him this bit of advice: "Never try to beat an expert at his own game."

"Is there anything which can be both rare and well done at the same time?" asked Dobbs, as he contemplated his roast beef. "Yes," said Nobbs, "a truly generous action is rare, and it is, of course, well done."

WHAT HE WAS QUICK AT.—A clerk was discharged, and asked the reason. "You are so awfully slow about everything," said his employer. "You do me an injustice," responded the clerk; "there is one thing I am not slow about." "I should like to hear you name it," sneered the employer. "Well," said the clerk, slowly, "nobody can get tired so quick as I can."

"Do you not think," said Dorothea to Ezekiel, "that there is something soft and tender in the fall of the beautiful snow?" Ezekiel scratched his head, and replied: "There is something soft and tender in the fall of a single snowflake, but when it comes to crawling out in the morning and shovelling away a big drift, it's simply disgusting."

SOCIETY.

THE QUEEN is expected to be at Balmoral towards the end of the month, but no date has as yet been fixed by Her Majesty for the removal of the Court. During her spring visit to Deeside the Queen will in all probability finally settle the details of the alterations and improvements to be effected on the Birkhall estate. When Her Majesty purchased the place from the Prince of Wales it was, we believe, with the intention of some day placing Princess Beatrice and her spouse there, as it is often found that Balmoral is not big enough to accommodate everybody. What with the Royals, the suites, the suites' servants, the servants' servants, and the ordinary retainers, it is a tight squeeze.

THE christening of the new Princess at Bagshot Church brought together a whole school of Royals, of whom the Queen was the most prominent figure.

The infant, who was the centre of attraction, wore a most elaborate and costly robe, her tiny form being lost in billows of lace and muslin. Her Majesty, who had previously kissed her latest granddaughter, handed her to the Bishop of Winchester, who performed the sacramental rite and then handed the precious infant back to the Sovereign, who passed it on to Lady Adela Larking, she in turn relinquishing it once more to a nurse of inferior grade.

Through all this game of "nobody's child" the babe behaved beautifully, although in her infantile way she no doubt wondered what it was all about. The names given her were Victoria Patricia Helena Elizabeth.

THE marriage of Colonel Knox (Scots Guards) with the Lady Sibyl Emily Lowther, eldest daughter of the late Henry, third Earl of Lonsdale and the Dowager Countess of Lonsdale, and sister of the present peer, was recently celebrated at Cottesmore Church, Oakham, Rutland.

The bridegroom presented each bridesmaid with a handsome brooch, the initials "G. S." being entwined in diamonds, as a souvenir of the event. The bride wore a dress of white satin, the train being trimmed all round with orange blossom, and had a wreath of the same flowers in her hair, and a tulle veil; her ornaments being diamonds.

Subsequently the bride and bridegroom left for Temple House, the residence of General Owen Williams (uncle of the bride) at Great Marlow. The bride wore a blue tailor-made travelling dress, with blue velvet hat, ornamented with a red feather.

LADY DUFFERIN is winning golden opinions in India. To be the wife of a man who has made history is an honour; to be his helpmeet a distinction. Such, apart from her social position, is the granddaughter of one whose name has passed with credit as a rebel in the days before the Union, Archibald Hamilton Rowan, the wife of the representative of the Kaiser-i-Hind, a descendant of the witty Sheridan, who himself inherited not only the blood but the brains of a versatile race. She is doing for the women in India all manner of good and useful things.

She is popular beyond measure in Indian society. The influence of ladies in the diplomatic world is great, and it is well when such influence is controlled by the sound sense and admirable tact which distinguish the wife of the Viceroy of India.

THE marriage of Mr. John H. B. Warner, of Quorn Hall, Leicestershire, and Miss Alice A. E. H. de Worms, eldest daughter of Baron Henry de Worms, M.P., was a very stylish wedding. The bride wore a white poult de soie, the front covered with Brussels point and thick garlands of orange blossom, a wreath of the same and tulle veil. She was accompanied by eight bridesmaids, four in white, four in pink.

STATISTICS.

THE number of pictures sent in to this year's Paris Salon scarcely passed 5,000. This is 4,000 less than two years ago.

According to a medical report just published, the cattle plague continues to ravage various parts of Russia. Within a period of five years, from 1876 to 1880, the loss is estimated at no less 1,203,500 head of horned cattle; but even these figures, based upon official information, are considered far below the real number.

AN extraordinary feat in telephoning was recently accomplished between St. Petersburg and Boulogne, a distance of 2,165 miles. Conversation was kept up, notwithstanding a rather high induction. The experiments were made during the night, when the telegraph wires were not at work. The Russian engineers hope to succeed in conversing by telephone over a distance of 4,665 miles.

GEMS.

BE not the fourth friend of him who had three before thee and lost them.

DOUGLAS JERROLD used to say that dogmatism was puppyism come to its growth.

A good word is an easy obligation; but not to speak ill requires only our silence, which costs us nothing.

EVERYTHING is good that takes away one plaything and delusion more, and drives us home to add one stroke of faithful work.

HE that useth many words for the explaining of any subject, doth, like the cuttlefish, hide himself for the most part in his own ink.

THE only true zeal is that which is guided by a good light in the head, and that which consists of good and innocent affection in the heart.

IT is a gentle and affectionate thought, that in immeasurable height above us, at our first birth, the wreath of love was woven with sparkling stars for flowers.

WHAT an argument in favour of social connection is the observation that by communicating our grief we have less, and by communicating our pleasures we have more!

LITTLE do men perceive what solitude is, and how far it extendeth; for a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

STEAK PIE OR PUDDING.—In making, sprinkle about half a teaspoonful of moist sugar over the steak, along with the pepper and salt; it not only improves the flavour, but makes the meat very tender.

SEWED MEAT.—Take a pound of scraps of meat. Fry these in dripping till brown, and also two onions, two carrots, and two turnips cut up small. Put both meat and vegetables into a saucepan, cover with water which has been thickened with a little flour, add pepper and salt, and simmer gently with the lid on the pan for an hour, or longer if the meat be tough. If liked, potatoes cut into quarters, and onions, can be stewed with the gravy. Serve very hot.

STEWED SCRAPS OF MEAT WITH ONIONS.—Grease a stewpan thickly with dripping, cover the bottom with a layer of onions, put a layer of meat on this, with pepper and salt, and repeat until all is used. Cover the saucepan closely, and stew very gently for an hour and a-half. The water which is in the onions will make plenty of gravy. Onions are nourishing and wholesome, and constitute a valuable article of food.

MISCELLANEOUS.

NEVER be sorry for any generous thing that you ever did, even if it was betrayed. Never be sorry that you were magnanimous if the person was mean afterwards. Never be sorry that you gave; it was right for you to give, even if you were imposed upon. You cannot afford to keep on the safe side by being mean.

STRENGTH.—If we put forth our strength of body or our powers of mind inordinately, without taking needed periods of rest, they will break down; but on the other hand, if we do not exert them at all, we lose them quite as surely. An unused muscle in time becomes inert, and the same is true of all our faculties. Beyond a certain point, to save them means to lose them; up to a certain point, to spend them means to increase them.

VAIN AND ARROGANT.—But behold the vain man, and observe the arrogant. He clotheth himself in rich attire, he walketh in the public street, he casteth round his eyes and courteth observation. He tosseth up his head, and overlooketh the poor; he treateth his inferiors with insolence; and his superiors in return, look down on his pride and folly with laughter. He despiseth the judgment of others; he relieth on his own opinion and is confounded. He is puffed up with the vanity of his imagination; his delight is to hear and speak of himself all the day long. He swalloweth with greediness his own praise; and the flatterer in return eateth him up.

FLOWERS IN THE TROPICS.—There is an erroneous idea about the profusion of fine flowers existing in the tropics. This is just one of the products of "the summer of the world," that the traveller fails to see unless he searches very closely. The great forest trees are too high for one to see whether they bear fruit or flowers. Of the great mass of lower vegetation nothing is seen but green foliage. One can traverse a forest-bound road for hours, sometimes days even, without seeing a blossom gay enough to attract admiration.

FLOORS.—Unless you are able to employ servants, don't be persuaded into varnished floors and rugs instead of carpets. Floors treated in this manner are a serious nuisance. Every footfall mars them, and it costs more to keep them in good order than to pay for carpets at the outset. If, however, they are repeatedly oiled and varnished, and ceaseless pains taken to keep them in good condition, the effect is very pleasing. Articles of furniture stand out against the dark varnish in rich and artistic contrast.

CLOTHING OF YOUNG GIRLS.—Some woollen fabric should be worn next to the skin, and should clothe the entire body as evenly as possible. The dress should be suitably long, and should be so made as to be suspended from the shoulders, and not from the waist. The petticoat also should be attached to an under-bodice, which like the dress, should receive its attachment from the shoulders. The stockings should be suspended from this bodice, and socks should be entirely discarded, as affording but a partial covering to the limbs. The neck, again, should never be left wholly uncovered. The ornamentation of the dress should be as scanty as possible, making the least possible addition to the weight of the attire.

PRACTICAL JOKES.—The ancients used to indulge in practical jokes to a considerable extent; for instance, the Thracians, at their drinking parties, sometimes played a game of hanging. They fixed a round noose to the bough of a tree and placed underneath it a stone of such shape that it would easily turn round when any one stood on it. Then they drew lots, and he who drew the lot took a sickle in his hand, stood on a stone, put his neck into the halter. The stone was kicked away, and if he could cut himself down with the sickle, well and good, but if he was not quick enough, he was hanged outright, and the rest laughed, thinking it good sport.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

L. M.—Jan. 21, 1869, fell on Sunday.
G. H.—No reliable knowledge of the concern named.
E. R. R.—*Patience* was first sung in London on April 23, 1861.

D. W. W.—Rancid butter is sometimes restored to its original sweetness by washing it first well with good fresh milk and afterwards with cold water.

A. H. G.—1. Dyes are generally used to colour eggs. 2. Any fancy design would answer, but only experienced persons should attempt to paint them.

C. C. W.—Habitual coldness or numbness of the hands may be relieved by rubbing them for a short time in cold water, following with dry friction.

C. B. A.—1. Zinc can be scoured with great economy of labour, time, and material by using either glycerine, stearine, naphthaline, or creosote mixed with dilute sulphuric acid.

S. W. W.—Victor Marie Hugo died on May 22, 1885; Victor Cousin in 1867; Henry W. Longfellow in 1882; William Cullen Bryant in 1878; Thomas Carlyle in 1881.

A. H. F.—To make indelible writing fluid, to good gall ink add a strong solution of fine soluble Prussian blue is distilled water. This ink writes greenish blue, but afterwards turns intensely blue.

B. M. C.—The duties of a secretary of an auxiliary missionary society comprise the keeping of its records as well as an account of the contributions received, and depositing the money in the hands of the treasurer.

S. B. W.—We presume you refer to corrosive sublimate, which is a very powerful mercurial preparation, operating quickly, and, if not properly regulated, producing violent effects. It should not be used unless prescribed by a physician.

L. L. N.—A furniture polish that is easily applied is made as follows: Take equal parts of sweet oil and vinegar. Add one pint of gum-arabic finely powdered. Put into a bottle. Before using shake the bottle well. Pour the polish on a rag and apply. No hard rubbing is necessary.

C. W.—For excoriated or ulcerated surfaces requiring a gentle stimulation, carrot extract is highly recommended. To prepare it, take of grated carrot root half a pound, lard a pound, wax four ounces. Melt the lard and wax, add the carrot root, evaporate with a moderate heat the moisture of the root, and strain.

G. W. W.—To prepare natural flowers, dip them in melted paraffine, withdrawing them quickly. The liquid should be only just hot enough to maintain its fluidity, and the flowers should be dipped one at a time, held by the stalks and moved about for an instant, to get rid of the bubbles. Fresh-cut flowers, free from moisture, make excellent specimens prepared in this way.

S. F.—1. Water acidulated with a little fresh lemon juice will sometimes remove freckles of recent appearance. Apply with a fine towel every night before retiring, and let the acid mixture dry on the face. 2. The same application is good for fishworms. 3. Bathing in tepid water is recommended for making less conspicuous "black rings around the eyes." 4. Moles should not be disturbed. 5. The hair enclosed is blonde.

P. M.—For grace, generally one form of acknowledgment to the Creator for favours bestowed is repeated at every meal. Of course it may be varied according to circumstances. The simpler the form the better; as, "We give Thee humble and hearty thanks for this Thy bounty; beseeching Thee to continue Thy loving kindness to us. Keep us temperate in our meats and drinks, and send down Thy blessings, temporal and spiritual, upon all our relations, friends, and neighbours."

C. M. A.—To make ginger ale, take of refined sugar three pounds, bruised Jamaica ginger two ounces, cream of tartar one ounce, sliced lemons, from two to four, boiling water four gallons, yeast four ounces. Pour the water on the first four ingredients, then strain, and add the yeast. When fermentation has continued for a few hours, bottle. The corks must be secured with twine or wire. The ale will be fit to drink within twelve hours after bottling. The filled bottles should be laid on their sides in a cool place.

L. F. K.—Fragrance may be imparted to tobacco by mixing with it, while slightly damp, a little cascarilla, either in very fine shreds or recently powdered. Cigars may be perfumed by moistening them externally with the concentrated tincture of cascarilla, or tincture of benzoin or storax, or a mixture of them; or a minute portion of the powder, shreds, root, or wood may be done up with the bundle of leaves that form the centre of the cigar. The so-called anticholeric and disinfecting cigars are scented with camphor, cascarilla, and benzoin.

N. C. T.—1. Printing ink is made in the following manner, the proportion of the ingredients varying, of course, with the amount of ink wanted:—Ten or twelve gallons of nut or linseed oil are set over the fire in a large iron pot, and brought to boil. It is then stirred with a ladle, and while boiling, the inflammable vapour arising from it either takes fire of itself or is kindled and is allowed to burn for half-an-hour, the pot being partially covered in order to regulate the flame. It is frequently stirred, that the whole may be equally heated and to prevent charring. The flame is then extinguished, and the oil is found to have lost much of

its greasy quality, and when cold, is of the consistency of soft turpentine, being now known as varnish. After this, it is made into ink by mixture with the requisite quantity of lampblack, of which about 24 ounces are sufficient for 16 ounces of the prepared oil. Several other additions are made to the oil while boiling, such as crusts of bread, turpentine, oilons, and other articles known to the manufacturer. This is done to give the oil more body, enable it to adhere to the printing paper, and to spread uniformly on the type. To improve the colour, powdered indigo or Prussian blue is often added.

W. W.—1. For the tape-worm no other remedy has yet shown itself as effectual as pumpkin seeds. The seeds—say two ounces—should be well bruised, and steeped in water. This should be drank freely, and renewed if necessary. An emulsion of pumpkin seeds is also good, to make which take two ounces of the seeds, and peel and pound them to a paste with one ounce of sugar. Then add by degrees eight fluid ounces of water. Dose, three draughts, at short intervals. In the interim fast. 2. A preparation of yellow dock root and sarsaparilla will purify the blood. All drugs keep it.

ONE SUMMER TIME.

My thoughts go back, and the years like shadows
Slip from between us and melt away;
And I am out in the sunny meadows
Raking and turning the new-mown hay;

The robin swings on the bough above me,
The brook strays on with a lary tune;
And I think, if only my love would love me,
Life were sweet as a day in June.

I look away to the low eaves, shining
Under their riotous wealth of flowers,
And sigh, with a heavy heart's repining—
"If only that dear little cot were ours!"
But, out in her garden, Mistress Mary,
Busily snipping a gadding spray,
Sweet as her posies, but so contrary,
Deigns but rarely to glance my way—
(My s'a's! how she flirted with Tom that day!

But when the haying was done and over,
And hollows were plink with the eglantine,
And all in the breezy, blooming clover,
Bees were drunken with honeyed wine,
Her words were kinder, her ways were gentler
As winds that dimple a summer sea;
And I said, in a rhapsody sentimental:
"At last she is learning to love me!"

And oft at the old lane's greenest turning,
Just at the orchard's thorny bound,
We met, when the first faint stars were burning,
But somehow Thomas was always around.
She smiled and sighed, and eve's young splendour
Touched her brows with a sadness sweet;
Her words were soft, and her glances tender—
How should I know her a heartless cheat!

The days drift on; in the green and may
Trydng-place of that dim old lane,
Tall and slim as a white field daisy,
Mary stands at the bare again;
I hear the wind thro' the hedges stealing,
The crickets chirp in the low swamp lands,
And Tom, in the dew-wet grasses kneeling,
Is clapping and kissing her two white hands.

The years' II back, and the moon's soft glory
Silvers the gloom where I sit apart,
And love is a sweet, unfinished glory
Whose moral is written upon my heart;
And I cherish thro' all life's care and scheming
This golden maxim, without alloy;
Trust no woman, white'er her seeming,
Who dangle two strings at her bow, my boy!

E. A. B.

LAURA F.—A slogan is now the war-cry, or gathering-word, of a Highland clan, according to the modern usage of the word. But it may be traced up to the earliest ages amongst the most ancient people, and it seems, till a recent period, to have been almost universal. Sometimes the cry was an appeal for protection; at other times it was commemorative of some signal transaction; and in many cases it was a shout of allusion to a well-known place of rendezvous. The Irish, in all cases, used the interjection *aboo* along with their war-cries, as *Butler-aboo*, *Cromwell-aboo*, and so forth. The Scotch-Irish carried with them to Ireland the ancient custom of war-cries, though they dismissed the *aboo*; and for a long period they used a general cry before the onset began, shouting with an allusion to their native country and their generic name, *Albanich*. After the Saxon tongue was introduced into North Britain, the war-cry was called the *slogan* or *slogan*, from the word *slog*, signifying an alarm of war. The Highland chiefs were most tenacious of their war-cries.

C. H. C.—The following description of preparing and mounting bird skins is as complete as can be given in such a limited space:—To prepare a bird-skin for stuffing, the implements required are a surgeon's scalpel (or a penknife will do), three pieces of annealed wire, sharpened at one end to a cutting point, sifted sawdust, cotton, some tow, a pair of tweezers, a spoon of thread, and a preserving mixture, composed of two parts of salt and one of alum. Lay the bird on its back, and part the feathers so as to make an incision from the end of the breast-bone to the tail, being careful not to cut through the walls of the abdomen. Sprinkle sawdust in the cut to absorb the moisture.

Raise the skin on one side of the incision, and press the flesh away from it. Much of the skinning may be done by the aid of a piece of wood shaped like a syringe. With this press the skin gently from the body till the leg is reached, then push it up through the skin, and sever it at the joint thus brought to view; repeat the same process on the other side of the body. Cut through the flesh and backbone to the skin of the back, using every care to save all the tail feathers. Proceed with the skinning to the wings, and sever them from the body at the second joint. Skin nearly to the base of the bill, removing the eyes and ears very carefully. Separate the neck by cutting a nearly square place in the base of the skull and jaw, which will allow the neck to be withdrawn, together with the tongue and some of the brains. Remove all remaining matter from the skull, and sprinkle freely with the salt and alum compound. Place a small piece of cotton in the eye orbits to keep them open. The "tanning" is performed by rubbing the above mixture into the skin till every part is thoroughly saturated with it. Take measurements of the skinned body, and on a piece of wire, which should be two inches longer than the bird, place the tow; winding it with the thread, and shaping it after the form of the skinned bird from the measurements taken. Insert this false body in the skin, running the sharpened end of the wire up through the centre of the skull clipping it off when the skin is dry. The remaining wires are thrust in the bottom of the foot, up through the leg, and firmly secured in the body. Sew up the cut in the abdomen, dressing the feathers nicely over it. Open the bill and fill the head with cotton; insert artificial eyes; fasten the feet wires to the perch, and finally bend the body into a natural position.

E. H. W.—1. The colour of the hair sent us is dark brown. 2. Your handwriting may be improved by daffy practice. 3. Glycerine diluted with pure cologne will whiten and soften the skin.

W. S. M.—1. In Russia drunkenness is said to be cured by steeping in liquor the bread, meat, and vegetables fancied by the patient, and also by putting into his tea and coffee his favourite spirit—at least one-third of a cupful. The result is that he soon becomes disgusted with even the colour of liquor, and gives up its use entirely.

D. S. S.—To make Liebig's extract of meat, out the lean of fresh-killed meat very small, put it into eight times its weight of cold water, and heat it gradually to the boiling point. When it has boiled for a few minutes, strain it through a cloth, and evaporate the liquor gently by water-bath to a soft mass. Two pounds of meat will yield one ounce of extract. Fat must be carefully excluded, or it will not keep.

G. G.—The use of birdlime for snaring birds is a relic of barbarism, and is exceedingly cruel, from the fact that many of them so trapped are allowed to die by slow torture in some out-of-the-way place to which they have dragged themselves. Unable to get food or water they gradually starve to death, and all to gratify an unsportsmanlike desire to obtain easy possession of them. This is the reason why we refuse to publish a recipe for making this compound.

G. S.—To make chocolate cake, for the cake take one coffee-cup of sugar, two eggs, half a cup of butter, half a cup of sweet milk, two cups of flour, and half a tea-spoonful of cream of tartar. To make the chocolate for the cake, take one and a half cups of brown sugar, one table-spoonful of butter, one table-spoonful of flour, one tea-cup of treacle, and a quarter of a tea-spoonful of soda. Let these ingredients boil for fifteen minutes, and then stir in half a cake of the chocolate you prefer; boil until thick; flavour with vanilla, and put the chocolate between layers of the cake when it is cold.

T. C. W.—Roses and other flowers are made to yield their perfume by steeping their leaves in water contained in a saucer or flat dish, and setting it in the sun. The leaves should not be fully covered, but a sufficient quantity of water allowed for evaporation. Let the dish be undisturbed for a few days, when a film will be found floating on the water. This is the essential oil of the flower, which should be taken up carefully and put into tiny phials. The phials should be kept open for a little while, to allow all watery particles to evaporate.

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